THE POETICAL WORKS

of

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. XII.

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

THE INN ALBUM

LONDON

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ROBERT BROWNING'S

POETICAL WORKS

VOL. XII.

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

OR

TURF AND TOWERS.

TO

MISS THACKERAY

RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

OR

TURF AND TOWERS.

1873.

I.

And so, here happily we meet, fair friend!
Again once more, as if the years rolled back
And this our meeting-place were just that Rome
Out in the champaign, say, o'er-rioted
By verdure, ravage, and gay winds that war
Against strong sunshine settled to his sleep;
Or on the Paris Boulevard, might it prove,
You and I came together saunteringly,
Bound for some shop-front in the Place Vendôme-
Gold-smithy and Golconda mine, that makes
"The Firm-Miranda" blazed about the world—
Or, what if it were London, where my toe

ed upon your flounce? "Small blame," yo
he Staircase Party in the Square
all and Early, and you broke no rib.

Even as we met where we have met so oft,
Now meet we on this unpretending beach
Below the little village: little, ay!
But pleasant, may my gratitude subjoin?
Meek, hitherto un-Murrayed bathing-place,
Best loved of sea-coast-nook-ful Normandy!
That, just behind you, is mine own hired house:
With right of pathway through the field in front,
No prejudice to all its growth unsheaved
Of emerald luzern bursting into blue.
Be sure I keep the path that hugs the wall,
Of mornings, as I pad from door to gate!
Yon yellow—what if not wild-mustard flower?—
Of that, my naked sole makes lawful prize,
Bruising the acrid aromatics out,
Till, what they preface, good salt savours sting
From, first, the sifted sands, then sands in slab,
Smooth save for pipy wreath-work of the worm:
(Granite and mussel-shell are ground alike
To glittering paste,—the live worm troubles yet.)
Then, dry and moist, the varech limit-line,
t cinder-black, with brown uncrumpled swathe

Of berried softness, sea-swoln thrice its size;
And, lo, the wave protrudes a lip at last,
And flecks my foot with froth, nor tempts in vain.

Such is Saint-Rambert, wilder very much
Than Joyeux, that famed Joyous-Gard of yours,
RE Some five miles farther down; much homelier too
Right for me,—right for you the fine and fair!
Only, I could endure a transfer—wrought
By angels famed still, through our countryside,
For weights they fetched and carried in old time
When nothing like the need was—transfer, just
Of Joyeux church, exchanged for yonder prig,
Our brand-new stone cream-coloured masterpiece

Well—and you know, and not since this one year
The quiet seaside country? So do I:
Who like it, in a manner, just because
Nothing is prominently likeable
To vulgar eye without a soul behind,
Which, breaking surface, brings before the ball
Of sight, a beauty buried everywhere.
If we have souls, know how to see and use,
One place performs, like any other place,
The proper service every place on earth
Was framed to furnish man with: serves alike

To give him note that, through the place he sees,
A place is signified he never saw,
But, if he lack not soul, may learn to know.
Earth's ugliest walled and ceiled imprisonment
May suffer, through its single rent in roof,
Admittance of a cataract of light
Beyond attainment through earth's palace-panes
Pinholed athwart their windowed filagree
By twinklings sobered from the sun outside.
Doubtless the High Street of our village here
Imposes hardly as Rome's Corso could:
And our projected race for sailing-boats
Next Sunday, when we celebrate our Saint,
Falls very short of that attractiveness,
That artistry in festive spectacle,
Paris ensures you when she welcomes back
(When shall it be?) the Assembly from Versailles;
While the best fashion and intelligence
Collected at the counter of our Mayor
(Dry goods he deals in, grocery beside)
What time the post-bag brings the news from Vire,—
I fear me much, it scarce would hold its own,
That circle, that assorted sense and wit,
With Five o'clock Tea in a house we know.

Still, 't is the check that gives the leap its lift.

The nullity of cultivated souls,
Even advantaged by their news from Vire,
Only conduces to enforce the truth
That, thirty paces off, this natural blue
Broods o'er a bag of secrets, all unbroached,
Beneath the bosom of the placid deep,
Since first the Post Director sealed them safe;
And formidable I perceive this fact—
Little Saint-Rambert touches the great sea.
From London, Paris, Rome, where men are men,
Not mice, and mice not Mayors presumably,
Thought scarce may leap so fast, alight so far.
But this is a pretence, you understand,
Disparagement in play, to parry thrust
Of possible objector: nullity
And ugliness, the taunt be his, not mine
Nor yours,—I think we know the world too well!
Did you walk hither, jog it by the plain,
Or jaunt it by the highway, braving bruise
From springless and uncushioned vehicle?
Much, was there not, in place and people both,
To lend an eye to? and what eye like yours—
The learned eye is still the loving one!
Our land: its quietude, productiveness,
Its length and breadth of grain-crop, meadow-ground,
Its orchards in the pasture, farms a-field

And hamlets on the road-edge, nought you missed
Of one and all the sweet rusticities!
From stalwart strider by the waggon-side,
Brightening the acre with his purple blouse,
To those dark-featured comely women-folk,
Healthy and tall, at work, and work indeed,
On every cottage door-step, plying brisk
Bobbins that bob you ladies out such lace!
Oh, you observed! and how that nimble play
Of finger formed the sole exception, bobbed
The one disturbance to the peace of things,
Where nobody esteems it worth his while,
If time upon the clock-face goes asleep,
To give the rusted hands a helpful push.
Nobody lifts an energetic thumb
And index to remove some dead and gone
Notice which, posted on the barn, repeats
For truth what two years' passage made a lie.
Still is for sale, next June, that same château
With all its immobilities,—were sold
Duly next June behind the last but last;
And, woe's me, still placards the Emperor
His confidence in war he means to wage,
God aiding and the rural populace.
No: rain and wind must rub the rags away
And let the lazy land untroubled snore.

Ah, in good truth? and did the drowsihead
So suit, so soothe the learned loving eye,
That you were minded to confer a crown,
(Does not the poppy boast such?)—call the land
By one slow hither-thither stretching, fast
Subsiding-into-slumber sort of name,
Symbolic of the place and people too,
"*White Cotton Night-cap Country?*" Excellent!
For they do, all, dear women young and old,
Upon the heads of them bear notably
This badge of soul and body in repose;
Nor its fine thimble fits the acorn-top,
Keeps woolly ward above that oval brown,
Its placid feature, more than muffler makes
A safeguard, circumvents intelligence
In—what shall evermore be named and famed,
If happy nomenclature aught avail,
"*White Cotton Night-cap Country.*"

Do I hear—
Oh, better, very best of all the news—
You mean to catch and cage the winged word,
And make it breed and multiply at home
Till Norman idlesse stock our England too?
Normandy shown minute yet magnified
In one of those small books, the truly great,

We never know enough, yet know so well?
How I foresee the cursive diamond-dints,—
Composite pen that plays the pencil too,—
As, touch the page and up the glamour goes,
And filmily o'er grain-crop, meadow-ground,
O'er orchard in the pasture, farm a-field
And hamlet on the road-edge, floats and forms
And falls, at lazy last of all, the Cap
That crowns the country! we, awake outside,
Farther than ever from the imminence
Of what cool comfort, what close coverture
Your magic, deftly weaving, shall surround
The unconscious captives with. Be theirs to drowse
Trammeled, and ours to watch the trammel-trick!
Ours be it, as we con the book of books,
To wonder how is winking possible!

All hail, "White Cotton Night-cap Country," then!
And yet, as on the beach you promise book,—
On beach, mere razor-edge 'twixt earth and sea,
I stand at such a distance from the world
That 't is the whole world which obtains regard,
Rather than any part, though part presumed
A perfect little province in itself,
When wayfare made acquaintance first therewith.
So standing, therefore, on this edge of things,

What if the backward glance I gave, return
Loaded with other spoils of vagrancy
Than I despatched it for, till I propose
The question—puzzled by the sudden store
Officious fancy plumps beneath my nose—
"Which sort of Night-cap have you glorified?'

You would be gracious to my ignorance:
"What other Night-cap than the normal one?—
Old honest guardian of man's head and hair
In its elastic yet continuous, soft,
No less persisting, circumambient gripe,—
Night's notice, life is respited from day!
Its form and fashion vary, suiting so
Each seasonable want of youth and age.
In infancy, the rosy naked ball
Of brain, and that faint golden fluff it bears,
Are smothered from disaster,—nurses know
By what foam-fabric; but when youth succeeds,
The sterling value of the article
Discards adornment, cap is cap henceforth
Unfeathered by the futile row on row.
Manhood strains hard a sturdy stocking-stuff
O'er well-deserving head and ears: the cone
Is tassel-tipt, commendably takes pride,
Announcing workday done and wages pouched,

And liberty obtained to sleep, nay, snore.
Unwise, he peradventure shall essay
The sweets of independency for once—
Waive its advantage on his wedding-night:
Fool, only to resume it, night the next,
And never part companionship again.
Since, with advancing years, night's solace soon
Intrudes upon the daybreak dubious life
Persuades it to appear the thing it is,
Half-sleep; and so, encroaching more and more,
It lingers long past the abstemious meal
Of morning, and, as prompt to serve, precedes
The supper-summons, gruel grown a feast.
Finally, when the last sleep finds the eye
So tired it cannot even shut itself,
Does not a kind domestic hand unite
Friend to friend, lid from lid to part no more,
Consigned alike to that receptacle
So bleak without, so warm and white within?

"Night-caps, night's comfort of the human race:
Their usage may be growing obsolete,
Still, in the main, the institution stays.
And though yourself may possibly have lived,
And probably will die, undignified—
The Never-night-capped—more experienced folk

Laugh you back answer—What should Night-cap be
Save Night-cap pure and simple? Sorts of such?
Take cotton for the medium, cast an eye
This side to comfort, lambswool or the like,
That side to frilly cambric costliness,
And all between proves Night-cap proper." Add
"Fiddle!" and I confess the argument.

Only, your ignoramus here again
Proceeds as tardily to recognize
Distinctions: ask him what a fiddle means,
And "Just a fiddle" seems the apt reply.
Yet, is not there, while we two pace the beach,
This blessed moment, at your Kensington,
A special Fiddle-Show and rare array
Of all the sorts were ever set to cheek,
'Stablished on clavicle, sawn bow-hand-wise,
Or touched lute-fashion and forefinger-plucked?
I doubt not there be duly catalogued
Achievements all and some of Italy,
Guarnerius, Straduarius,—old and new,
Augustly rude, refined to finicking,
This mammoth with his belly full of blare,
That mouse of music—inch-long silvery wheeze.
And here a specimen has effloresced
Into the scroll-head, there subsides supreme,

And with the tail-piece satisfies mankind.
Why should I speak of woods, grains, stains and streaks,
The topaz varnish or the ruby gum?
We preferably pause where tickets teach
"Over this sample would Corelli croon,
Grieving, by minors, like the cushat-dove,
Most dulcet Giga, dreamiest Saraband."
"From this did Paganini comb the fierce
Electric sparks, or to tenuity
Pull forth the inmost wailing of the wire—
No cat-gut could swoon out so much of soul!"

Three hundred violin-varieties
Exposed to public view! And dare I doubt
Some future enterprise shall give the world
Quite as remarkable a Night-cap-show?
Methinks, we, arm-in-arm, that festal day,
Pace the long range of relics shrined aright,
Framed, glazed, each cushioned curiosity,
And so begin to smile and to inspect:
"Pope's sickly head-sustainment, damped with dews
Wrung from the all-unfair fight: such a frame—
Though doctor and the devil helped their best—
Fought such a world that, waiving doctor's help,
Had the mean devil at its service too!
Voltaire's imperial velvet! Hogarth eyed

The thumb-nail record of some alley-phyz,
Then chucklingly clapped yonder cosiness
On pate, and painted with true flesh and blood!
Poor hectic Cowper's soothing sarsnet-stripe!"
And so we profit by the catalogue,
Somehow our smile subsiding more and more,
Till we decline into . . . but no! shut eyes
And hurry past the shame uncoffined here,
The hangman's toilet! If we needs must trench,
For science' sake which craves completeness still,
On the sad confine, not the district's self,
The object that shall close review may be . . .

Well, it is French, and here are we in France:
It is historic, and we live to learn,
And try to learn by reading story-books.
It is an incident of 'Ninety-two,
And, twelve months since, the Commune had the sway.
Therefore resolve that, after all the Whites
Presented you, a solitary Red
Shall pain us both, a minute and no more!
Do not you see poor Louis pushed to front
Of palace-window, in persuasion's name,
A spectacle above the howling mob
Who tasted, as it were, with tiger-smack,
The outstart, the first spirt of blood on brow,

The Phrygian symbol, the new crown of thorns,
The Cap of Freedom? See the feeble mirth
At odds with that half-purpose to be strong
And merely patient under misery!
And note the ejaculation, ground so hard
Between his teeth, that only God could hear,
As the lean pale proud insignificance
With the sharp-featured liver-worried stare
Out of the two grey points that did him stead
And passed their eagle-owner to the front
Better than his mob-elbowed undersize,—
The Corsican lieutenant commented
"Had I but one good regiment of my own,
How soon should volleys to the due amount
Lay stiff upon the street-flags this *canaille!*
As for the droll there, he that plays the king
And screws out smile with a Red night-cap on,
He 's done for! Somebody must take his place."
White Cotton Night-cap Country: excellent!
Why not Red Cotton Night-cap Country too?

"Why not say swans are black and blackbirds white,
Because the instances exist?" you ask.
"Enough that white, not red, predominates,
Is normal, typical, in cleric phrase
Quod semel, semper, et ubique." Here,

Applying such a name to such a land,
Especially you find inopportune,
Impertinent, my scruple whether white
Or red describes the local colour best.
"Let be" (you say), "the universe at large
Supplied us with exceptions to the rule,
So manifold, they bore no passing-by,—
Little Saint-Rambert has conserved at least
The pure tradition: white from head to heel,
Where is a hint of the ungracious hue?
See, we have traversed with hop, step and jump,
From heel to head, the main-street in a trice,
Measured the garment (help my metaphor!)
Not merely criticized the cap, forsooth;
And were you pricked by that collecting-itch,
That pruriency for writing o'er your reds
'Rare, rarer, rarest, not rare but unique,'—
The shelf, Saint-Rambert, of your cabinet,
Unlabelled,—virginal, no Rahab-thread
For blushing token of the spy's success,—
Would taunt with vacancy, I undertake!
What, yonder is your best apology,
Pretence at most approach to naughtiness,
Impingement of the ruddy on the blank?
This is the criminal Saint-Rambertese
Who smuggled in tobacco, half-a-pound!

The Octroi found it out and fined the wretch.
This other is the culprit who despatched
A hare, he thought a hedgehog (clods obstruct),
Unfurnished with Permission for the Chase!
As to the womankind—renounce from those
The hope of getting a companion-tinge,
First faint touch promising romantic fault!"

Enough: there stands Red Cotton Night-cap shelf—
A cavern's ostentatious vacancy—
My contribution to the show; while yours—
Whites heap your row of pegs from every hedge
Outside, and house inside Saint-Rambert here—
We soon have come to end of. See, the church
With its white steeple gives your challenge point,
Perks as it were the night-cap of the town,
Starchedly warrants all beneath is matched
By all above, one snowy innocence!

You put me on my mettle. British maid
And British man, suppose we have it out
Here in the fields, decide the question so?
Then, British fashion, shake hands hard again,
Go home together, friends the more confirmed
That one of us—assuredly myself—
Looks puffy about eye, and pink at nose?

Which "pink" reminds me that the arduousness
We both acknowledge in the enterprise,
Claims, counts upon a large and liberal
Acceptance of as good as victory
In whatsoever just escapes defeat.
You must be generous, strain point, and call
Victory, any the least flush of pink
Made prize of, labelled scarlet for the nonce—
Faintest pretension to be wrong and red
And picturesque, that varies by a splotch
The righteous flat of insipidity.

Quick to the quest, then—forward, the firm foot!
Onward, the quarry-overtaking eye!
For, what is this, by way of march-tune, makes
The musicalest buzzing at my ear
By reassurance of that promise old
Though sins are scarlet they shall be as wool?
Whence—what fantastic hope do I deduce?
I am no Liebig: when the dyer dyes
A texture, can the red dye prime the white?
And if we washed well, wrung the texture hard,
Would we arrive, here, there and everywhere,
At a fierce ground beneath the surface meek?

I take the first chance, rub to threads what rag

Shall flutter snowily in sight. For see!
Already these few yards upon the rise,
Our back to brave Saint-Rambert, how we reach
The open, at a dozen steps or strides!
Turn round and look about, a breathing-while!
There lie, outspread at equidistance, thorpes
And villages and towns along the coast,
Distinguishable, each and all alike,
By white persistent Night-cap, spire on spire.
Take the left: yonder town is—what say you
If I say "Londres"? Ay, the mother-mouse
(Reversing fable, as truth can and will)
Which gave our mountain of a London birth!
This is the Conqueror's country, bear in mind,
And Londres-district blooms with London-pride.
Turn round: La Roche, to right, where oysters thrive:
Monlieu—the lighthouse is a telegraph;
This, full in front, Saint-Rambert; then succeeds
Villeneuve, and Pons the Young with Pons the Old,
And—ere faith points to Joyeux, out of sight,
A little nearer—oh, La Ravissante!

There now is something like a Night-cap spire,
Donned by no ordinary Notre-Dame
For, one of the three safety-guards of France,
You front now, lady! Nothing intercepts

The privilege, by crow-flight, two miles far.
She and her sisters Lourdes and La Salette
Are at this moment hailed the cynosure
Of poor dear France, such waves have buffeted
Since she eschewed infallibility
And chose to steer by the vague compass-box.
This same midsummer month, a week ago,
Was not the memorable day observed
For reinstatement of the misused Three
In old supremacy for evermore?
Did not the faithful flock in pilgrimage
By railway, diligence and steamer—nay
On foot with staff and scrip, to see the sights
Assured them? And I say best sight was here:
And nothing justified the rival Two
In their pretension to equality;
Our folk laid out their ticket-money best,
And wiseliest, if they walked, wore shoe away;
Not who went farther only to fare worse.
For, what was seen at Lourdes and La Salette
Except a couple of the common cures
Such as all three can boast of, any day?
While here it was, here and by no means there,
That the Pope's self sent two great real gold crowns
As thick with jewelry as thick could stick,
His present to the Virgin and her Babe—

Provided for—who knows not?—by that fund,
Count Alessandro Sforza's legacy,
Which goes to crown some Virgin every year.
But this year, poor Pope was in prison-house,
And money had to go for something else;
And therefore, though their present seemed the Pope's,
The faithful of our province raised the sum
Preached and prayed out of—nowise purse alone.
Gentle and simple paid in kind, not cash,
The most part: the great lady gave her brooch,
The peasant-girl her hair-pin; 't was the rough
Bluff farmer mainly who,—admonished well
By wife to care lest his new colewort-crop
Stray sorrowfully sparse like last year's seed,—
Lugged from reluctant pouch the fifty-franc,
And had the Curé's hope that rain would cease.
And so, the sum in evidence at length,
Next step was to obtain the donative
By the spontaneous bounty of the Pope—
No easy matter, since his Holiness
Had turned a deaf ear, long and long ago,
To much entreaty on our Bishop's part,
Commendably we boast. "But no," quoth he,
"Image and image needs must take their turn:
Here stand a dozen as importunate."
Well, we were patient; but the cup ran o'er

When—who was it pressed in and took the prize
But our own offset, set far off indeed
To grow by help of our especial name,
She of the Ravissante—in Martinique!
"What?" cried our patience at the boiling-point,
"The daughter crowned, the mother's head goes bare?
Bishop of Raimbaux!"—that 's our diocese—
"Thou hast a summons to repair to Rome,
Be efficacious at the Council there:
Now is the time or never! Right our wrong!
Hie thee away, thou valued Morillon,
And have the promise, thou who hast the vote!"
So said, so done, so followed in due course
(To cut the story short) this festival,
This famous Twenty-second, seven days since.

Oh, but you heard at Joyeux! Pilgrimage,
Concourse, procession with, to head the host,
Cardinal Mirecourt, quenching lesser lights:
The leafy street-length through, decked end to end
With August-strippage, and adorned with flags
That would have waved right well but that it rained
Just this picked day, by some perversity.
And so were placed, on Mother and on Babe,
The pair of crowns: the Mother's, you must see!
Miranda, the great Paris goldsmith, made

The marvel,—he 's a neighbour: that 's his park
Before you, tree-topped wall we walk toward.
His shop it was turned out the masterpiece,
Probably at his own expenditure;
Anyhow, his was the munificence
Contributed the central and supreme
Splendour that crowns the crown itself, The Stone
Not even Paris, ransacked, could supply
That gem: he had to forage in New-York,
This jeweller, and country-gentleman,
And most undoubted devotee beside!
Worthily wived, too: since his wife it was
Bestowed "with friendly hand"—befitting phrase!
The lace which trims the coronation-robe—
Stiff wear—a mint of wealth on the brocade.
Do go and see what I saw yesterday!
And, for that matter, see in fancy still,
Since . . .

There now! Even for unthankful me,
Who stuck to my devotions at high-tide
That festal morning, never had a mind
To trudge the little league and join the crowd—
Even for me is miracle vouchsafed!
How pointless proves the sneer at miracles!
As if, contrariwise to all we want

And reasonably look to find, they graced
Merely those graced-before, grace helps no whit,
Unless, made whole, they need physician still.
I—sceptical in every inch of me—
Did I deserve that, from the liquid name
"Miranda,"—faceted as lovelily
As his own gift, the gem,—a shaft should shine,
Bear me along, another Abaris,
Nor let me light till, lo, the Red is reached,
And yonder lies in luminosity!

Look, lady! where I bade you glance but now!
Next habitation, though two miles away,—
No tenement for man or beast between,—
That, park and domicile, is country-seat
Of this same good Miranda! I accept
The augury. Or there, or nowhere else,
Will I establish that a Night-cap gleams
Of visionary Red, not White for once!
"Heaven" saith the sage "is with us, here inside
Each man:" "Hell also," simpleness subjoins,
By White and Red describing human flesh.

And yet as we continue, quicken pace,
Approach the object which determines me
Victorious or defeated, more forlorn

My chance seems,—that is certainty at least.
Halt midway, reconnoitre! Either side
The path we traverse (turn and see) stretch fields
Without a hedge: one level, scallop-striped
With bands of beet and turnip and luzern,
Limited only by each colour's end,
Shelves down,—we stand upon an eminence,—
To where the earth-shell scallops out the sea,
A sweep of semicircle; and at edge—
Just as the milk-white incrustations stud
At intervals some shell-extremity,
So do the little growths attract us here,
Towns with each name I told you: say, they touch
The sea, and the sea them, and all is said,
So sleeps and sets to slumber that broad blue!
The people are as peaceful as the place.
This, that I call "the path" is road, highway;
But has there passed us by a market-cart,
Man, woman, child, or dog to wag a tail?
True, I saw weeders stooping in a field;
But—formidably white the Cap's extent!

Round again! Come, appearance promises!
The boundary, the park-wall, ancient brick,
Upholds a second wall of tree-heads high
Which overlean its top, a solid green.

That surely ought to shut in mysteries!
A jeweller—no unsuggestive craft!
Trade that admits of much romance, indeed.
For, whom but goldsmiths used old monarchs pledge
Regalia to, or seek a ransom from,
Or pray to furnish dowry, at a pinch,
According to authentic story-books?
Why, such have revolutionized this land
With diamond-necklace-dealing! not to speak
Of families turned upside-down, because
The gay wives went and pawned clandestinely
Jewels, and figured, till found out, with paste,
Or else redeemed them—how, is horrible!
Then there are those enormous criminals
That love their ware and cannot lose their love,
And murder you to get your purchase back.
Others go courting after such a stone,
Make it their mistress, marry for their wife,
And find out, some day, it was false the while,
As ever wife or mistress, man too fond
Has named his Pilgrim, Hermit, Ace of Hearts.

Beside—what style of edifice begins
To grow in sight at last and top the scene?
That grey roof, with the range of *lucarnes*, four
I count, and that erection in the midst—

Clock-house, or chapel-spire, or what, above?
Conventual, that, beyond manorial, sure!
And reason good; for Clairvaux, such its name,
Was built of old to be a Priory,
Dependence on that Abbey-for-the-Males
Our Conqueror founded in world-famous Caen,
And where his body sought the sepulture
It was not to retain: you know the tale.
Such Priory was Clairvaux, prosperous
Hundreds of years; but nothing lasts below,
And when the Red Cap pushed the Crown aside,
The Priory became, like all its peers,
A National Domain: which, bought and sold
And resold, needs must change, with ownership,
Both outside show and inside use; at length
The messuage, three-and-twenty years ago,
Became the purchase of rewarded worth
Impersonate in Father—I must stoop
To French phrase for precision's sake, I fear—
Father Miranda, goldsmith of renown:
By birth a Madrilene, by domicile
And sojourning accepted French at last.
His energy it was which, trade transferred
To Paris, throve as with a golden thumb,
Established in the Place Vendôme. He bought
Not building only, but belongings far

And wide, at Gonthier there, Monlieu, Villeneuve,
A plentiful estate: which, twelve years since,
Passed, at the good man's natural demise,
To Son and Heir Miranda—Clairvaux here,
The Paris shop, the mansion—not to say
Palatial residence on Quai Rousseau,
With money, moveables, a mine of wealth—
And young Léonce Miranda got it all.

Ah, but—whose might the transformation be?
Were you prepared for this, now? As we talked,
We walked, we entered the half-privacy,
The partly-guarded precinct: passed beside
The little paled-off islet, trees and turf,
Then found us in the main ash-avenue
Under the blessing of its branchage-roof.
Till, on emergence, what affronts our gaze?
Priory—Conqueror—Abbey-for-the-Males—
Hey, presto, pass, who conjured all away?
Look through the railwork of the gate: a park
—Yes, but *à l'Anglaise*, as they compliment!
Grass like green velvet, gravel-walks like gold,
Bosses of shrubs, embosomings of flowers,
Lead you—through sprinkled trees of tiny breed
Disporting, within reach of coverture,
By some habitual acquiescent oak

Or elm, that thinks, and lets the youngsters laugh—
Lead, lift at last your soul that walks the air,
Up to the house-front, or its back perhaps—
Whether façade or no, one coquetry
Of coloured brick and carved stone! Stucco? Well,
The daintiness is cheery, that I know,
And all the sportive floral framework fits
The lightsome purpose of the architect.
Those *lucarnes* which I called conventual, late,
Those are the outlets in the *mansarde*-roof;
And, underneath, what long light elegance
Of windows here suggests how brave inside
Lurk eyeballed gems they play the eyelids to!
Festive arrangements look through such, be sure!
And now the tower a-top, I took for clock's
Or bell's abode, turns out a quaint device,
Pillared and temple-treated Belvedere—
Pavilion safe within its railed-about
Sublimity of area—whence what stretch
Of sea and land, throughout the seasons' change,
Must greet the solitary! Or suppose
—If what the husband likes, the wife likes too—
The happy pair of students cloistered high,
Alone in April kiss when Spring arrives!
Or no, he mounts there by himself to meet
Winds, welcome wafts of sea-smell, first white bird

That flaps thus far to taste the land again,
And all the promise of the youthful year;
Then he descends, unbosoms straight his store
Of blessings in the bud, and both embrace,
Husband and wife, since earth is Paradise,
And man at peace with God. You see it all?

Let us complete our survey, go right round
The place: for here, it may be, we surprise
The Priory,—these solid walls, big barns,
Grey orchard-grounds, huge four-square stores for stock,
Betoken where the Church was busy once.
Soon must we come upon the Chapel's self.
No doubt next turn will treat us to . . . Aha,
Again our expectation proves at fault!
Still the bright graceful modern—not to say
Modish adornment, meets us: *Parc Anglais*,
Tree-sprinkle, shrub-embossment as before.
See, the sun splits on yonder bauble world
Of silvered glass concentring, every side,
All the adjacent wonder, made minute
And touched grotesque by ball-convexity!
Just so, a sense that something is amiss,
Something is out of sorts in the display,
Affects us, past denial, everywhere.

The right erection for the Fields, the Wood,
(Fields—but *Elysées*, wood—but *de Boulogne*)
Is peradventure wrong for wood and fields
When Vire, not Paris, plays the Capital.

So may a good man have deficient taste;
Since Son and Heir Miranda, he it was
Who, six years now elapsed, achieved the work
And truly made a wilderness to smile.
Here did their domesticity reside,
A happy husband and as happy wife,
Till . . . how can I in conscience longer keep
My little secret that the man is dead
I, for artistic purpose, talk about
As if he lived still? No, these two years now,
Has he been dead. You ought to sympathize,
Not mock the sturdy effort to redeem
My pledge, and wring you out some tragedy
From even such a perfect commonplace!
Suppose I boast the death of such desert
My tragic bit of Red? Who contravenes
Assertion that a tragedy exists
In any stoppage of benevolence,
Utility, devotion above all?
Benevolent? There never was his like:
For poverty, he had an open hand

. . . Or stop—I use the wrong expression here—
An open purse, then, ever at appeal;
So that the unreflecting rather taxed
Profusion than penuriousness in alms.
One, in his day and generation, deemed
Of use to the community? I trust
Clairvaux thus renovated, regalized,
Paris expounded thus to Normandy,
Answers that question. Was the man devout?
After a life—one mere munificence
To Church and all things churchly, men or mice,—
Dying, his last bequeathment gave land, goods,
Cash, every stick and stiver, to the Church,
And notably to that church yonder, that
Beloved of his soul, La Ravissante—
Wherefrom, the latest of his gifts, the Stone
Gratefully bore me as on arrow-flash
To Clairvaux, as I told you.

"Ay, to find
Your Red desiderated article,
Where every scratch and scrape provokes my White
To all the more superb a prominence!
Why, 't is the story served up fresh again—
How it befell the restive prophet old
Who came and tried to curse, but blessed the land.

Come, your last chance! he disinherited
Children: he made his widow mourn too much
By this endowment of the other Bride—
Nor understood that gold and jewelry
Adorn her in a figure, not a fact.
You make that White, I want, so very white,
'T is I say now—some trace of Red should be
Somewhere in this Miranda-sanctitude!"

Not here, at all events, sweet mocking friend!
For he was childless; and what heirs he had
Were an uncertain sort of Cousinry
Scarce claiming kindred so as to withhold
The donor's purpose though fantastical:
Heirs, for that matter, wanting no increase
Of wealth, since rich already as himself;
Heirs that had taken trouble off his hands,
Bought that productive goldsmith-business he,
With abnegation wise as rare, renounced
Precisely at a time of life when youth,
Nigh on departure, bids mid-age discard
Life's other loves and likings in a pack,
To keep, in lucre, comfort worth them all.
This Cousinry are they who boast the shop
Of "Firm-Miranda, London and New-York."
Cousins are an unconscionable kind;

But these—pretension surely on their part
To share inheritance were too absurd!

"Remains then, he dealt wrongly by his wife,
Despoiled her somehow by such testament?"
Farther than ever from the mark, fair friend!
The man's love for his wife exceeded bounds
Rather than failed the limit. 'T was to live
Hers and hers only, to abolish earth
Outside—since Paris holds the pick of earth—
He turned his back, shut eyes, stopped ears to all
Delicious Paris tempts her children with,
And fled away to this far solitude—
She peopling solitude sufficiently!
She, partner in each heavenward flight sublime,
Was, with each condescension to the ground,
Duly associate also: hand in hand,
. . . Or side by side, I say by preference—
On every good work sidelingly they went.
Hers was the instigation—none but she
Willed that, if death should summon first her lord,
Though she, sad relict, must drag residue
Of days encumbered by this load of wealth—
(Submitted to with something of a grace
So long as her surviving vigilance
Might worthily administer, convert

Wealth to God's glory and the good of man,
Give, as in life, so now in death, effect
To cherished purpose)—yet she begged and prayed
That, when no longer she could supervise
The House, it should become a Hospital:
For the support whereof, lands, goods and cash
Alike will go, in happy guardianship,
To yonder church, La Ravissante: who debt
To God and man undoubtedly will pay.

"Not of the world, your heroine!"

Do you know
I saw her yesterday—set eyes upon
The veritable personage, no dream?
I in the morning strolled this way, as oft,
And stood at entry of the avenue.
When, out from that first garden-gate, we gazed
Upon and through, a small procession swept—
Madame Miranda with attendants five.
First, of herself: she wore a soft and white
Engaging dress, with velvet stripes and squares
Severely black, yet scarce discouraging:
Fresh Paris-manufacture! (Vire's would do?
I doubt it, but confess my ignorance.)
Her figure? somewhat small and darlinglike.

Her face? well, singularly colourless,
For first thing: which scarce suits a blonde, you know.
Pretty you would not call her: though perhaps
Attaining to the ends of prettiness
And somewhat more, suppose enough of soul.
Then she is forty full: you cannot judge
What beauty was her portion at eighteen,
The age she married at. So, colourless
I stick to, and if featureless I add,
Your notion grows completer: for, although
I noticed that her nose was aquiline,
The whole effect amounts with me to—blank!
I never saw what I could less describe.
The eyes, for instance, unforgettable
Which ought to be, are out of mind as sight.

Yet is there not conceivably a face,
A set of wax-like features, blank at first,
Which, as you bendingly grow warm above,
Begins to take impressment from your breath?
Which, as your will itself were plastic here
Nor needed exercise of handicraft,
From formless moulds itself to correspond
With all you think and feel and are—in fine
Grows a new revelation of yourself,
Who know now for the first time what you want?

Here has been something that could wait awhile,
Learn your requirement, nor take shape before,
But, by adopting it, make palpable
Your right to an importance of your own,
Companions somehow were so slow to see!
—Far delicater solace to conceit
Than should some absolute and final face,
Fit representative of soul inside,
Summon you to surrender—in no way
Your breath's impressment, nor, in stranger's guise,
Yourself—or why of force to challenge you?
Why should your soul's reflection rule your soul?
("You" means not you, nor me, nor anyone
Framed, for a reason I shall keep suppressed,
To rather want a master than a slave:
The slavish still aspires to dominate!)
So, all I say is, that the face, to me
One blur of blank, might flash significance
To who had seen his soul reflected there
By that symmetric silvery phantom-like
Figure, with other five processional.
The first, a black-dressed matron—maybe, maid—
Mature, and dragonish of aspect,—marched;
Then four came tripping in a joyous flock,
Two giant goats and two prodigious sheep
Pure as the arctic fox that suits the snow

Tripped, trotted, turned the march to merriment,
But ambled at their mistress' heel—for why?
A rod of guidance marked the *Châtelaine*,
And ever and anon would sceptre wave,
And silky subject leave meandering.
Nay, one great naked sheep-face stopped to ask
Who was the stranger, snuffed inquisitive
My hand that made acquaintance with its nose,
Examined why the hand—of man at least—
Patted so lightly, warmly, so like life!
Are they such silly natures after all?
And thus accompanied, the paled-off space,
Isleted shrubs and verdure, gained the group;
Till, as I gave a furtive glance, and saw
Her back-hair was a block of solid gold,
The gate shut out my harmless question—Hair
So young and yellow, crowning sanctity,
And claiming solitude . . . can hair be false?

"Shut in the hair and with it your last hope
Yellow might on inspection pass for Red!—
Red, Red, where is the tinge of promised Red
In this old tale of town and country life,
This rise and progress of a family?
First comes the bustling man of enterprise,
The fortune-founding father, rightly rough,

As who must grub and grab, play pioneer.
Then, with a light and airy step, succeeds
The son, surveys the fabric of his sire
And enters home, unsmirched from top to toe.
Polish and education qualify
Their fortunate possessor to confine
His occupancy to the first-floor suite
Rather than keep exploring needlessly
Where dwelt his sire content with cellarage :
Industry bustles underneath, no doubt,
And supervisors should not sit too close.
Next, rooms built, there 's the furniture to buy,
And what adornment like a worthy wife?
In comes she like some foreign cabinet,
Purchased indeed, but purifying quick
What space receives it from all traffic-taint.
She tells of other habits, palace-life ;
Royalty may have pried into those depths
Of sandal-wooded drawer, and set a-creak
That pygmy portal pranked with lazuli.
More fit by far the ignoble we replace
By objects suited to such visitant
Than that we desecrate her dignity
By neighbourhood of vulgar table, chair,
Which haply helped old age to smoke and doze.
The end is, an exchange of city-stir

And too intrusive burgess-fellowship,
For rural isolated elegance,
Careless simplicity, how preferable!
There one may fairly throw behind one's back
The used-up worn-out Past, we want away,
And make a fresh beginning of stale life.
'In just the place'—does anyone object?—
'Where aboriginal gentility
Will scout the upstart, twit him with each trick
Of townish trade-mark that stamps word and deed,
And most of all resent that here town-dross
He daubs with money-colour to deceive!'
Rash'y objected! Is there not the Church
To intercede and bring benefic truce
At outset? She it is shall equalize
The labourers i' the vineyard, last as first.
Pay court to her, she stops impertinence.
'Duke, once your sires crusaded it, we know:
Our friend the newcomer observes, no less,
Your chapel, rich with their emblazonry,
Wants roofing—might he but supply the means!
Marquise, you gave the honour of your name,
Titular patronage, abundant will
To what should be an Orphan Institute:
Gave everything but funds, in brief; and these,

Our friend, the lady newly resident,
Proposes to contribute, by your leave!'
Brothers and sisters lie they in thy lap,
Thou none-excluding, all-collecting Church!
Sure, one has half a foot i' the hierarchy
Of birth, when 'Nay, my dear,' laughs out the Duke,
'I'm the crown's cushion-carrier, but the crown—
Who gave its central glory, I or you?'
When Marquise jokes 'My quest, forsooth? Each doit
I scrape together goes for Peter-pence
To purvey bread and water in his bonds
For Peter's self imprisoned—Lord, how long?
Yours, yours alone the bounty, dear my dame,
You plumped the purse which, poured into the plate,
Made the Archbishop open brows so broad!
And if you really mean to give that length
Of lovely lace to edge the robe!' . . . Ah, friends,
Gem better serves so than by calling crowd
Round shop-front to admire the million's-worth!
Lace gets more homage than from *lorgnette*-stare,
And comment coarse to match, (should one display
One's robe a trifle o'er the *baignoire*-edge,)
'Well may she line her slippers with the like,
If minded so! their shop it was produced
That wonderful *parure*, the other day,
Whereof the Baron said it beggared him.'

And so the paired Mirandas built their house,
Enjoyed their fortune, sighed for family,
Found friends would serve their purpose quite as well,
And come, at need, from Paris—anyhow,
With evident alacrity, from Vire—
Endeavour at the chase, at least succeed
In smoking, eating, drinking, laughing, and
Preferring country, oh so much to town!
Thus lived the husband; though his wife would sigh
In confidence, when Countesses were kind,
'Cut off from Paris and society!'
White, White, I once more round you in the ears!
Though you have marked it, in a corner, yours
Henceforth,—Red-lettered 'Failure' very plain,
I shall acknowledge, on the snowy hem
Of ordinary Night-cap! Come, enough!
We have gone round its cotton vastitude,
Or half-round, for the end 's consistent still,
A *cul-de-sac* with stoppage at the sea.
Here we return upon our steps. One look
May bid good morning—properly good night—
To civic bliss, Miranda and his mate!
Are we to rise and go?"

No, sit and stay!
Now comes my moment, with the thrilling throw

Of curtain from each side a shrouded case.
Don't the rings shriek an ominous "Ha! ha!
So you take Human Nature upon trust?"
List but with like trust to an incident
Which speedily shall make quite Red enough
Burn out of yonder spotless napery!
Sit on the little mound here, whence you seize
The whole of the gay front sun-satisfied,
One laugh of colour and embellishment!
Because it was there,—past those laurustines,
On that smooth gravel-sweep 'twixt flowers and sward,—
There tragic death befell; and not one grace
Outspread before you but is registered
In that sinistrous coil these last two years
Were occupied in winding smooth again.

"True?" Well, at least it was concluded so,
Sworn to be truth, allowed by Law as such
(With my concurrence, if it matter here)
A month ago: at Vire they tried the case.

II.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, then, . . . but stay!
Permit me a preliminary word,
And, after, all shall go so straight to end!

Have you, the travelled lady, found yourself
Inside a ruin, fane or bath or cirque,
Renowned in story, dear through youthful dream?
If not,—imagination serves as well.
Try fancy-land, go back a thousand years,
Or forward, half the number, and confront
Some work of art gnawn hollow by Time's tooth,—
Hellenic temple, Roman theatre,
Gothic cathedral, Gallic Tuileries,
But ruined, one and whichsoe'er you like.
Obstructions choke what still remains intact,
Yet proffer change that 's picturesque in turn;
Since little life begins where great life ends,
And vegetation soon amalgamates,
Smooths novel shape from out the shapeless old,
Till broken column, battered cornice block

The centre with a bulk half weeds and flowers,
Half relics you devoutly recognize.
Devoutly recognizing,—hark, a voice
Not to be disregarded! "Man worked here
Once on a time; here needs again to work;
Ruins obstruct, which man must remedy."
Would you demur "Let Time fulfil his task,
And, till the scythe-sweep find no obstacle,
Let man be patient"?

The reply were prompt:
"Glisteningly beneath the May-night moon,
Herbage and floral coverture bedeck
Yon splintered mass amidst the solitude:
Wolves occupy the background, or some snake
Glides by at distance; picturesque enough!
Therefore, preserve it? Nay, pour daylight in,—
The mound proves swarming with humanity.
There never was a thorough solitude,
Now you look nearer: mortal busy life
First of all brought the crumblings down on pate,
Which trip man's foot still, plague his passage much,
And prove—what seems to you so picturesque
To him is . . . but experiment yourself
On how conducive to a happy home
Will be the circumstance your bed for base

Boasts tessellated pavement,—equally
Affected by the scorpion for his nest,—
While what o'erroofs bed is an architrave,
Marble, and not unlikely to crush man
To mummy, should its venerable prop,
Some fig-tree-stump, play traitor underneath.
Be wise! Decide! For conservation's sake,
Clear the arena forthwith! lest the tread
Of too-much-tried impatience trample out
Solid and unsubstantial to one blank
Mud-mixture, picturesque to nobody,—
And, task done, quarrel with the parts intact
Whence came the filtered fine dust, whence the crash
Bides but its time to follow. Quick conclude
Removal, time effects so tardily,
Of what is plain obstruction; rubbish cleared,
Let partial-ruin stand while ruin may,
And serve world's use, since use is manifold.
Repair wreck, stanchion wall to heart's content,
But never think of renovation pure
And simple, which involves creation too.
Transform and welcome! Yon tall tower may help
(Though built to be a belfry and nought else)
Some Father Secchi to tick Venus off
In transit: never bring there bell again,

To damage him aloft, brain us below,
When new vibrations bury both in brick!"

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, furnishing
The application at his cost, poor soul!
Was instanced how,—because the world lay strewn
With ravage of opinions in his path,
And neither he, nor any friendly wit,
Knew and could teach him which was firm, which frail,
In his adventure to walk straight through life
The partial-ruin,—in such enterprise,
He straggled into rubbish, struggled on,
And stumbled out again observably.
"Yon buttress still can back me up," he judged:
And at a touch down came both he and it.
"A certain statue, I was warned against,
Now, by good fortune, lies well under foot,
And cannot tempt to folly any more:"
So, lifting eye, aloft since safety lay,
What did he light on? the Idalian shape,
The undeposed, erectly Victrix still!
"These steps ascend the labyrinthine stair
Whence, darkling and on all-fours, out I stand
Exalt and safe, and bid low earth adieu—
For so instructs 'Advice to who would climb:'"

And all at once the climbing landed him
—Where, is my story.

Take its moral first.
Do you advise a climber? Have respect
To the poor head, with more or less of brains
To spill, should breakage follow your advice!
Head-break to him will be heart-break to you
For having preached "Disturb no ruins here!
Are not they crumbling of their own accord?
Meantime, let poets, painters keep a prize!
Beside, a sage pedestrian picks his way."
A sage pedestrian—such as you and I!
What if there trip, in merry carelessness,
And come to grief, a weak and foolish child?
Be cautious how you counsel climbing, then!

Are you adventurous and climb yourself?
Plant the foot warily, accept a staff,
Stamp only where you probe the standing-point,
Move forward, well assured that move you may:
Where you mistrust advance, stop short, there stick!
This makes advancing slow and difficult?
Hear what comes of the endeavour of brisk youth
To foot it fast and easy! Keep this same
Notion of outside mound and inside mash,

Towers yet intact round turfy rottenness,
Symbolic partial-ravage,—keep in mind!
Here fortune placed his feet who first of all
Found no incumbrance, till head found . . . But hear!

This son and heir then of the jeweller,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, at his birth,
Mixed the Castilian passionate blind blood
With answerable gush, his mother's gift,
Of spirit, French and critical and cold.
Such mixture makes a battle in the brain,
Ending as faith or doubt gets uppermost;
Then will has way a moment, but no more:
So nicely-balanced are the adverse strengths,
That victory entails reverse next time.
The tactics of the two are different
And equalize the odds: for blood comes first,
Surrounding life with undisputed faith.
But presently, a new antagonist,
By scarce-suspected passage in the dark,
Steals spirit, fingers at each crevice found
Athwart faith's stronghold, fronts the astonished man:
"Such pains to keep me far, yet here stand I,
Your doubt inside the faith-defence of you!"

With faith it was friends bulwarked him about

From infancy to boyhood ; so, by youth,
He stood impenetrably circuited,
Heaven-high and low as hell : what lacked he thus,
Guarded against aggression, storm or sap ?
What foe would dare approach ? Historic Doubt ?
Ay, were there some half-knowledge to attack !
Batter doubt's best, sheer ignorance will beat.
Acumen metaphysic ?—drills its way
Through what, I wonder ! A thick feather-bed
Of thoughtlessness, no operating tool—
Framed to transpierce the flint-stone—fumbles at,
With chance of finding an impediment !
This Ravissante, now : when he saw the church
For the first time, and to his dying-day,
His firm belief was that the name fell fit
From the Delivering Virgin, niched and known ;
As if there wanted records to attest
The appellation was a pleasantry,
A pious rendering of Rare Vissante,
The proper name which erst our province bore.
He would have told you that Saint Aldabert
Founded the church, (Heaven early favoured France,)
About the second century from Christ ;
Though the true man was Bishop of Raimbaux,
Eleventh in succession, Eldobert,

Who flourished after some six hundred years.
He it was brought the image "from afar,"
(Made out of stone the place produces still)
"Infantine Art divinely artless," (Art
In the decrepitude of Decadence,)
And set it up a-working miracles
Until the Northmen's fury laid it low,
Not long, however: an egregious sheep,
Zealous with scratching hoof and routing horn,
Unearthed the image in good Mailleville's time,
Count of the country. "If the tale be false,
Why stands it carved above the portal plain?"
Monsieur Lêonce Miranda used to ask.
To Londres went the prize in solemn pomp,
But, liking old abode and loathing new,
Was borne—this time, by angels—back again.
And, reinaugurated, miracle
Succeeded miracle, a lengthy list,
Until indeed the culmination came—
Archbishop Chaumont prayed a prayer and vowed
A vow—gained prayer and paid vow properly—
For the conversion of Prince Vertgalant.
These facts, sucked in along with mother's-milk,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would dispute
As soon as that his hands were flesh and bone,
Milk-nourished two-and-twenty years before.

So fortified by blind Castilian blood,
What say you to the chances of French cold
Critical spirit, should Voltaire besiege
"Alp, Apennine, and fortified redoubt"?
Ay, would such spirit please to play faith's game
Faith's way, attack where faith defends so well!
But then it shifts, tries other strategy.
Coldness grows warmth, the critical becomes
Unquestioning acceptance. "Share and share
Alike in facts, to truth add other truth!
Why with old truth needs new truth disagree?"

Thus doubt was found invading faith, this time,
By help of not the spirit but the flesh:
Fat Rabelais chuckled, where faith lay in wait
For lean Voltaire's grimace—French, either foe.
Accordingly, while round about our friend
Ran faith without a break which learned eye
Could find at two-and-twenty years of age,
The twenty-two-years-old frank footstep soon
Assured itself there spread a standing-space
Flowery and comfortable, nowise rock
Nor pebble-pavement roughed for champion's tread
Who scorns discomfort, pacing at his post.
Tall, long-limbed, shoulder right and shoulder left,
And 'twixt *acromia* such a latitude,

Black heaps of hair on head, and blacker bush
O'er-rioting chin, cheek and throat and chest,—
His brown meridional temperament
Told him—or rather pricked into his sense
Plainer than language—"Pleasant station here!
Youth, strength, and lustihood can sleep on turf
Yet pace the stony platform afterward:
First signal of a foe and up they start!
Saint Eldobert, at all such vanity,
Nay—sinfulness, had shaken head austere.
Had he? But did Prince Vertgalant? And yet,
After how long a slumber, of what sort,
Was it, he stretched octogenary joints
And, nigh on Day-of-Judgment trumpet-blast,
Jumped up and manned wall, brisk as any bee?"

Nor Rabelais nor Voltaire, but Sganarelle,
You comprehend, was pushing through the chink!
That stager in the saint's correct costume,
Who ever has his speech in readiness
For thickhead juvenility at fault:
"Go pace yon platform and play sentinel!
You won't? The worse! but still a worse might hap.
Stay then, provided that you keep in sight
The battlement, one bold leap lands you by!
Resolve not desperately 'Wall or turf,

Choose this, choose that, but no alternative!'
No! Earth left once were left for good and all:
'With Heaven you may accommodate yourself.'"

Saint Eldobert—I much approve his mode;
With sinner Vertgalant I sympathize;
But histrionic Sganarelle, who prompts
While pulling back, refuses yet concedes,—
Whether he preach in chair, or print in book,
Or whisper due sustainment to weak flesh,
Counting his sham beads threaded on a lie—
Surely, one should bid pack that mountebank!
Surely, he must have momentary fits
Of self-sufficient stage-forgetfulness,
Escapings of the actor-lassitude
When he allows the grace to show the grin,
Which ought to let even thickheads recognize
(Through all the busy and benefic part,—
Bridge-building, or rock-riving, or good clean
Transport of church and congregation both
From this to that place with no harm at all,)
The Devil, that old stager, at his trick
Of general utility, who leads
Downward, perhaps, but fiddles all the way!

Therefore, no sooner does our candidate

For saintship spotlessly emerge soul-cleansed
From First Communion to mount guard at post,
Paris-proof, top to toe, than up there starts
The Spirit of the Boulevard—you know Who—
With jocund "So, a structure fixed as fate,
Faith's tower joins on to tower, no ring more round,
Full fifty years at distance, too, from youth!
Once reach that precinct and there fight your best,
As looking back you wonder what has come
Of daisy-dappled turf you danced across!
Few flowers that played with youth shall pester age,
However age esteem the courtesy;
And Eldobert was something past his prime,
Stocked Caen with churches ere he tried hand here.
Saint-Sauveur, Notre-Dame, Saint-Pierre, Saint-Jean
Attest his handiwork commenced betimes.
He probably would preach that turf is mud.
Suppose it mud, through mud one picks a way,
And when, clay-clogged, the struggler steps to stone,
He uncakes shoe, arrives in manlier guise
Than carried pick-a-back by Eldobert
Big-baby-fashion, lest his leathers leak!
All that parade about Prince Vertgalant
Amounts to—your Castilian helps enough—
Inveni ovem quæ perierat:
But ask the pretty votive statue-thing

What the lost sheep's meantime amusements were
Till the Archbishop found him! That stays blank:
They washed the fleece well and forgot the rest.
Make haste, since time flies, to determine, though!"

Thus opportunely took up parable,—
Admonishing Miranda just emerged
Pure from The Ravissante and Paris-proof,—
Saint Sganarelle: then slipped aside, changed mask,
And made re-entry as a gentleman
Born of the Boulevard, with another speech
I spare you.

So, the year or two revolved,
And ever the young man was dutiful
To altar and to hearth: had confidence
In the whole Ravissantish history.
Voltaire? Who ought to know so much of him,—
Old sciolist, whom only boys think sage,—
As one whose father's house upon the Quai
Neighboured the very house where that Voltaire
Died mad and raving, not without a burst
Of squibs and crackers too significant?
Father and mother hailed their best of sons,
Type of obedience, domesticity,
Never such an example inside doors!

Outside, as well not keep too close a watch ;
Youth must be left to some discretion there.
And what discretion proved, I find deposed
At Vire, confirmed by his own words: to wit,
How, with the sprightliness of twenty-five,
Five—and not twenty, for he gave their names
With laudable precision—were the few
Appointed by him unto mistress-ship ;
While, meritoriously the whole long week
A votary of commerce only, week
Ended, "at shut of shop on Saturday,
Do I, as is my wont, get drunk," he writes
In airy record to a confidant.
"Bragging and lies!" replied the apologist:
"And do I lose by that?" laughed Somebody
At the Court-edge a-tiptoe, mid the crowd,
In his own clothes, a-listening to men's Law.

Thus while, prospectively a combatant,
The volunteer bent brows, clenched jaws, and fierce
Whistled the march-tune "Warrior to the wall!"
Something like flowery laughters round his feet
Tangled him of a sudden with "Sleep first!"
And fairly flat upon the turf sprawled he
And let strange creatures make his mouth their
home.

Anyhow, 't is the nature of the soul
To seek a show of durability,
Nor, changing, plainly be the slave of change.
Outside the turf, the towers: but, round the turf,
A tent may rise, a temporary shroud,
Mock-faith to suit a mimic dwelling-place:
Tent which, while screening jollity inside
From the external circuit—evermore
A menace to who lags when he should march—
Yet stands a-tremble, ready to collapse
At touch of foot: turf is acknowledged grass,
And grass, though pillowy, held contemptible
Compared with solid rock, the rampired ridge.
To truth a pretty homage thus we pay
By testifying—what we dally with,
Falsehood, (which, never fear we take for truth!)
We may enjoy, but then—how we despise!

Accordingly, on weighty business bound,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda stooped to play,
But, with experience, soon reduced the game
To principles, and thenceforth played by rule:
Rule, dignifying sport as sport, proclaimed
No less that sport was sport and nothing more.
He understood the worth of womankind,—
To furnish man—provisionally—sport:

Sport transitive—such earth's amusements are:
But, seeing that amusements pall by use,
Variety therein is requisite.
And since the serious work of life were wronged
Should we bestow importance on our play,
It follows, in such womankind-pursuit,
Cheating is lawful chase. We have to spend
An hour—they want a lifetime thrown away:
We seek to tickle sense—they ask for soul,
As if soul had no higher ends to serve!
A stag-hunt gives the royal creature law:
Bat-fowling is all fair with birds at roost,
The lantern and the clapnet suit the hedge.
Which must explain why, bent on Boulevard game,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda decently
Was prudent in his pleasure—passed himself
Off on the fragile fair about his path
As the gay devil rich in mere good looks,
Youth, hope—what matter though the purse be void?
"If I were only young Miranda, now,
Instead of a poor clerkly drudge at desk
All day, poor artist vainly bruising brush
On palette, poor musician scraping gut
With horsehair teased that no harmonics come!
Then would I love with liberality,
Then would I pay!—who now shall be repaid,

Repaid alike for present pain and past,
If Mademoiselle permit the contre-danse,
Sing 'Gay in garret youth at twenty lives,'
And afterward accept a lemonade!"

Such sweet facilities of intercourse
Afford the Winter-Garden and Mabille!
"Oh, I unite"—runs on the confidence,
Poor fellow, that was read in open Court,
—"Amusement with discretion: never fear
My *escapades* cost more than market-price!
No durably-attached Miranda-dupe,
Sucked dry of substance by two clinging lips,
Promising marriage, and performing it!
Trust me, I know the world, and know myself,
And know where duty takes me—in good time!"

Thus fortified and realistic, then,
At all points thus against illusion armed,
He wisely did New Year inaugurate
By playing truant to the favoured five:
And sat installed at "The Varieties,"—
Playhouse appropriately named,—to note
(Prying amid the turf that 's flowery there)
What primrose, firstling of the year, might push
The snows aside to deck his button-hole—

Unnoticed by that outline sad, severe,
(Though fifty good long years removed from youth)
That tower and tower,—our image, bear in mind!

No sooner was he seated than, behold,
Out burst a polyanthus! He was 'ware
Of a young woman niched in neighbourhood;
And ere one moment flitted, fast was he
Found captive to the beauty evermore,
For life, for death, for heaven, for hell, her own.
Philosophy, bewail thy fate! Adieu,
Youth realistic and illusion-proof!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda,—hero late
Who "understood the worth of womankind,"
"Who found therein—provisionally—sport,"—
Felt, in the flitting of a moment, fool
Was he, and folly all that seemed so wise,
And the best proof of wisdom's birth would be
That he made all endeavour, body, soul,
By any means, at any sacrifice
Of labour, wealth, repute, and (—well, the time
For choosing between heaven on earth, and heaven
In heaven, was not at hand immediately—)
Made all endeavour, without loss incurred
Of one least minute, to obtain her love.
"Sport transitive?" "Variety required?"

"In loving were a lifetime thrown away?"
How singularly may young men mistake!
The fault must be repaired with energy.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda ate her up
With eye-devouring; when the unconscious fair
Passed from the close-packed hall, he pressed behind;
She mounted vehicle, he did the same,
Coach stopped, and cab fast followed, at one door—
Good house in unexceptionable street.
Out stepped the lady,—never think, alone!
A mother was not wanting to the maid,
Or, may be, wife, or widow, might one say?
Out stepped and properly down flung himself
Monsieur Léonce Miranda at her feet—
And never left them after, so to speak,
For twenty years, till his last hour of life,
When he released them, as precipitate.
Love proffered and accepted then and there!
Such potency in word and look has truth.

Truth I say, truth I mean: this love was true,
And the rest happened by due consequence.
By which we are to learn that there exists
A falsish false, for truth 's inside the same,
And truth that 's only half true, falsish truth.

The better for both parties! folk may taunt
That half your rock-built wall is rubble-heap:
Answer them, half their flowery turf is stones!
Our friend had hitherto been decking coat
If not with stones, with weeds that stones befit,
With dandelions—"primrose-buds," smirked he;
This proved a polyanthus on his breast,
Prize-lawful or prize-lawless, flower the same.
So with his other instance of mistake:
Was Christianity the Ravissante?

And what a flower of flowers he chanced on now!
To primrose, polyanthus I prefer
As illustration, from the fancy-fact
That out of simple came the composite
By culture: that the florist bedded thick
His primrose-root in ruddle, bullock's blood,
Ochre and devils'-dung, for aught I know,
Until the pale and pure grew fiery-fine,
Ruby and topaz, rightly named anew.
This lady was no product of the plain;
Social manure had raised a rarity.
Clara de Millefleurs (note the happy name)
Blazed in the full-blown glory of her Spring.
Peerlessly perfect, form and face: for both—
"Imagine what, at seventeen, may have proved

Miss Pages, the actress: Pages herself, my dear!"
Noble she was, the name denotes: and rich?
"The apartment in this Coliseum Street,
Furnished, my dear, with such an elegance,
Testifies wealth, my dear, sufficiently!
What quality, what style and title, eh?
Well now, waive nonsense, you and I are boys
No longer: somewhere must a screw be slack!
Don't fancy, Duchesses descend at door
From carriage-step to stranger prostrate stretched,
And bid him take heart, and deliver mind,
March in and make himself at ease forthwith,—
However broad his chest and black his beard,
And comely his belongings,—all through love
Protested in a world of ways save one
Hinting at marriage!"—marriage which yet means
Only the obvious method, easiest help
To satisfaction of love's first demand,
That love endure eternally: "my dear,
Somewhere or other must a screw be slack!"

Truth is the proper policy: from truth—
Whate'er the force wherewith you fling your speech,—
Be sure that speech will lift you, by rebound,
Somewhere above the lowness of a lie!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda heard too true

A tale—perhaps I may subjoin, too trite!
As the meek martyr takes her statued stand
Above our pity, claims our worship just
Because of what she puts in evidence,
Signal of suffering, badge of torture borne
In days gone by, shame then but glory now,
Barb, in the breast, turned aureole for the front!
So, half timidity, composure half,
Clara de Millefleurs told her martyrdom.

Of poor though noble parentage, deprived
Too early of a father's guardianship,
What wonder if the prodigality
Of nature in the girl, whose mental gifts
Matched her external dowry, form and face—
If these suggested a too prompt resource
To the resourceless mother? "Try the Stage
And so escape starvation! Prejudice
Defames Mimetic Art: be yours to prove
That gold and dross may meet and never mix,
Purity plunge in pitch yet soil no plume!"

All was prepared in London—(you conceive
The natural shrinking from publicity
In Paris, where the name excites remark)
London was ready for the grand *début*;

When some perverse ill-fortune, incident
To art mimetic, some malicious thrust
Of Jealousy who sidles 'twixt the scenes
Or pops up sudden from the prompter's hole,—
Somehow the brilliant bubble burst in suds.
Want followed: in a foreign land, the pair!
O hurry over the catastrophe—
Mother too sorely tempted, daughter tried
Scarcely so much as circumvented, say!
Caged unsuspecting artless innocence!

Monsieur Léonce Miranda tell the rest!—
The rather that he told it in a style
To puzzle Court Guide students, much more me.
"Brief, she became the favourite of Lord N.,
An aged but illustrious Duke, thereby
Breaking the heart of his competitor
The Prince of O. Behold her palaced straight
In splendour, clothed in diamonds" (phrase how fit!),
"Giving tone to the City by the Thames!
Lord N., the aged but illustrious Duke,
Was even on the point of wedding her,
Giving his name to her" (why not to us?)
"But that her better angel interposed.
She fled from such a fate to Paris back,
A fortnight since: conceive Lord N.'s despair!

Duke as he is, there 's no invading France.
He must restrict pursuit to postal plague
Of writing letters daily, duly read
As darlingly she hands them to myself,
The privileged supplanter, who therewith
Light a cigar and see abundant blue"—
(Either of heaven or else Havanna-smoke.)
"Think! she, who helped herself to diamonds late,
In passion of disinterestedness
Now—will accept no tribute of my love
Beyond a paltry ring, three Louis'-worth!
Little she knows I have the rummaging
Of old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme!"
So wrote entrancedly to confidant
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. Surely now,
If Heaven, that sees all, understands no less,
It finds temptation pardonable here,
It mitigates the promised punishment,
It recognizes that to tarry just
An April hour amid such dainty turf
Means no rebellion against task imposed
Of journey to the distant wall one day?
Monsieur Léonce Miranda puts the case!
Love, he is purposed to renounce, abjure;
But meanwhile, is the case a common one?
Is it the vulgar sin, none hates as he?

Which question, put directly to "his dear"
(His brother—I will tell you in a trice)
Was doubtless meant, by due meandering,
To reach, to fall not unobserved before
The auditory cavern 'neath the cope
Of Her, the placable, the Ravissante.
But here 's the drawback, that the image smiles,
Smiles on, smiles ever, says to supplicant
"Ay, ay, ay"—like some kindly weathercock
Which, stuck fast at Set Fair, Favonian Breeze,
Still warrants you from rain, though Auster's lead
Bring down the sky above your cloakless mirth.
Had he proposed this question to, nor "dear"
Nor Ravissante, but prompt to the Police,
The Commissary of his Quarter, now—
There had been shaggy eyebrows elevate
With twinkling apprehension in each orb
Beneath, and when the sudden shut of mouth
Relaxed,—lip pressing lip, lest out should plump
The pride of knowledge in too frank a flow,—
Then, fact on fact forthcoming, dose were dealt
Of truth remedial in sufficiency
To save a chicken threatened with the pip,
Head-staggers and a tumble from its perch.

Alack, it was the lady's self that made

The revelation, after certain days
—Nor so unwisely! As the haschisch-man
Prepares a novice to receive his drug,
Adroitly hides the soil with sudden spread
Of carpet ere he seats his customer:
Then shows him how to smoke himself about
With Paradise; and only when, at puff
Of pipe, the Houri dances round the brain
Of dreamer, does he judge no need is now
For circumspection and punctiliousness;
He may resume the serviceable scrap
That made the votary unaware of muck.
Just thus the lady, when her brewage—love—
Was well a-fume about the novice-brain,
Saw she might boldly pluck from underneath
Her lover the preliminary lie.

Clara de Millefleurs, of the noble race,
Was Lucie Steiner, child to Dominique
And Magdalen Commercy; born at Sierck,
About the bottom of the Social Couch.
The father having come and gone again,
The mother and the daughter found their way
To Paris, and professed mode-merchandize,
Were milliners, we English roughlier say;
And soon a fellow-lodger in the house,

Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, young and smart,
Tailor by trade, perceived his housemate's youth,
Smartness, and beauty over and above.
Courtship was brief, and marriage followed quick,
And quicklier—impecuniosity.
The young pair quitted Paris to reside
At London: which repaid the compliment
But scurvily, since not a whit the more
Trade prospered by the Thames than by the Seine.
Failing all other, as a last resource,
"He would have trafficked in his wife,"—she said.
If for that cause they quarrelled, 't was, I fear,
Rather from reclamation of her rights
To wifely independence, than as wronged
Otherwise by the course of life proposed:
Since, on escape to Paris back again
From horror and the husband,—ill-exchanged
For safe maternal home recovered thus,—
I find her domiciled and dominant
In that apartment, Coliseum Street,
Where all the splendid magic met and mazed
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's venturous eye.
Only, the same was furnished at the cost
Of someone notable in days long since,
Carlino Centofanti: he it was
Found entertaining unawares—if not

An angel, yet a youth in search of one.
Why this revealment after reticence?
Wherefore, beginning "Millefleurs," end at all
Steiner, Muhlhausen, and the ugly rest?
Because the unsocial purse-comptrolling wight,
Carlino Centofanti,—made aware
By misadventure that his bounty, crumbs
From table, comforted a visitant,—
Took churlish leave, and left, too, debts to pay.
Loaded with debts, the lady needs must bring
Her soul to bear assistance from a friend
Beside that paltry ring, three Louis'-worth;
And therefore might the little circumstance
That Monsieur Léonce had the rummaging
Of old Papa's shop in the Place Vendôme
Pass, perhaps, not so unobservably.

Frail shadow of a woman in the flesh,
These very eyes of mine saw yesterday,
Would I re-tell this story of your woes,
Would I have heart to do you detriment
By pinning all this shame and sorrow plain
To that poor *chignon*,—staying with me still,
Though form and face have well-nigh faded now,—
But that men read it, rough in brutal print,
As two years since some functionary's voice

Rattled all this—and more by very much—
Into the ear of vulgar Court and crowd?
Whence, by reverberation, rumblings grew
To what had proved a week-long roar in France,
Had not the dreadful cannonry drowned all.
Was, now, the answer of your advocate
More than just this? "The shame fell long ago,
The sorrow keeps increasing: God forbid
We judge man by the faults of youth in age!"
Permit me the expression of a hope
Your youth proceeded like your avenue,
Stepping by bush, and tree, and taller tree,
Until, columnar, at the house they end.
So might your creeping youth columnar rise
And reach, by year and year, symmetrical,
To where all shade stops short, shade's service done
Bushes on either side, and boughs above,
Darken, deform the path else sun would streak;
And, cornered half-way somewhere, I suspect
Stagnation and a horse-pond: hurry past!
For here 's the house, the happy half-and-half
Existence—such as stands for happiness
True and entire, howe'er the squeamish talk!
Twenty years long, you may have loved this man;
He must have loved you; that 's a pleasant life,
Whatever was your right to lead the same.

The white domestic pigeon pairs secure,
Nay, does mere duty by bestowing egg
In authorized compartment, warm and safe,
Boarding about, and gilded spire above,
Hoisted on pole, to dogs' and cats' despair!
But I have spied a veriest trap of twigs
On tree-top, every straw a thievery,
Where the wild dove—despite the fowler's snare,
The sportsman's shot, the urchin's stone,—crooned gay,
And solely gave her heart to what she hatched,
Nor minded a malignant world below.
I throw first stone forsooth? 'T is mere assault
Of playful sugarplum against your cheek,
Which, if it makes cheek tingle, wipes off rouge!
You, my worst woman? Ah, that touches pride,
Puts on his mettle the exhibitor
Of Night-caps, if you taunt him "This, no doubt,—
Now we have got to Female-garniture,—
Crowns your collection, Reddest of the row!"
O unimaginative ignorance
Of what dye's depth keeps best apart from worst
In womankind!—how heaven's own pure may seem
To blush aurorally beside such blanched
Divineness as the women-wreaths named White:
While hell, eruptive and fuliginous,
Sickens to very pallor as I point

Her place to a Red clout called woman too !
Hail, heads that ever had such glory once
Touch you a moment, like God's cloven tongues
Of fire ! your lambent aureoles lost may leave
You marked yet, dear beyond true diadems :
And hold, each foot, nor spurn, to man's disgrace,
What other twist of fetid rag may fall !
Let slink into the sewer the cupping-cloth !

Lucie, much solaced, I re-finger you,
The medium article ; if ruddy-marked
With iron-mould, your cambric,—clean at least
From poison-speck of rot and purulence.
Lucie Muhlhausen said—"Such thing am I :
Love me, or love me not !" Miranda said
"I do love, more than ever, most for this."
The revelation of the very truth
Proved the concluding necessary shake
Which bids the tardy mixture crystallize
Or else stay ever liquid : shoot up shaft,
Durably diamond, or evaporate—
Sluggish solution through a minute's slip.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda took his soul
In both his hands, as if it were a vase,
To see what came of the convulsion there,
And found, amid subsidence, love new-born

So sparklingly resplendent, old was new.
"Whatever be my lady's present, past,
Or future, this is certain of my soul,
I love her: in despite of all I know,
Defiance of the much I have to fear,
I venture happiness on what I hope,
And love her from this day for evermore:
No prejudice to old profound respect
For certain Powers! I trust they bear in mind
A most peculiar case, and straighten out
What 's crooked there, before we close accounts.
Renounce the world for them—some day I will:
Meantime, to me let her become the world!"

Thus mutely might our friend soliloquize
Over the tradesmen's bills, his Clara's gift—
In the apartment, Coliseum Street,
Carlino Centofanti's legacy,
Provided rent and taxes were discharged—
In face of Steiner now, De Millefleurs once,
The tailor's wife and runaway confessed.

On such a lady if election light,
(According to a social prejudice)
If henceforth "all the world" she constitute
For any lover,—needs must he renounce

Our world in ordinary, walked about
By couples loving as its laws prescribe,—
Renunciation sometimes difficult.
But, in this instance, time and place and thing
Combined to simplify experiment,
And make Miranda, in the current phrase,
Master the situation passably.

For first facility, his brother died—
Who was, I should have told you, confidant,
Adviser, referee and substitute,
All from a distance : but I knew how soon
This younger brother, lost in Portugal,
Had to depart and leave our friend at large.
Cut off abruptly from companionship
With brother-soul of bulk about as big,
(Obvious recipient—by intelligence
And sympathy, poor little pair of souls—
Of much affection and some foolishness)
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, meant to lean
By nature, needs must shift the leaning-place
To his love's bosom from his brother's neck,
Or fall flat unrelieved of freight sublime.

Next died the lord of the Aladdin's cave,
Master o' the mint and keeper of the keys

Of chests chokeful with gold and silver changed
By Art to forms where wealth forgot itself,
And caskets where reposed each pullet-egg
Of diamond, slipping flame from fifty slants.
In short, the father of the family
Took his departure also from our scene,
Leaving a fat succession to his heir
Monsieur Léonce Miranda,—"fortunate
If ever man was, in a father's death,"
(So commented the world,—not he, too kind,
Could that be, rather than scarce kind enough)
Indisputably fortunate so far,
That little of incumbrance in his path,
Which money kicks aside, would lie there long.

And finally, a rough but wholesome shock,
An accident which comes to kill or cure,
A jerk which mends a dislocated joint!
Such happy chance, at cost of twinge, no doubt,
Into the socket back again put truth,
And stopped the limb from longer dragging lie.
For love suggested "Better shamble on,
And bear your lameness with what grace you may!"
And but for this rude wholesome accident,
Continuance of disguise and subterfuge,
Retention of first falsehood as to name

And nature in the lady, might have proved
Too necessary for abandonment.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda probably
Had else been loath to cast the mask aside,
So politic, so self-preservative,
Therefore so pardonable—though so wrong!
For see the bugbear in the background! Breathe
But ugly name, and wind is sure to waft
The husband news of the wife's whereabout:
From where he lies perdue in London town,
Forth steps the needy tailor on the stage,
Deity-like from dusk machine of fog,
And claims his consort, or his consort's worth
In rubies which her price is far above.
Hard to propitiate, harder to oppose,—
Who but the man's self came to banish fear,
A pleasant apparition, such as shocks
A moment, tells a tale, then goes for good!

Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen proved no less
Nor more than "Gustave," lodging opposite
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's diamond-cave
And ruby-mine, and lacking little thence
Save that its gnome would keep the captive safe,
Never return his Clara to his arms.
For why? He was become the man in vogue,

The indispensable to who went clothed
Nor cared encounter Paris-fashion's blame,—
Such miracle could London absence work.
Rolling in riches—so translate "the vogue"—
Rather his object was to keep off claw
Should griffin scent the gold, should wife lay claim
To lawful portion at a future day,
Than tempt his partner from her private spoils.
Best forage each for each, nor coupled hunt!

Pursuantly, one morning,—knock at door
With knuckle, dry authoritative cough,
And easy stamp of foot, broke startlingly
On household slumber, Coliseum Street:
"Admittance in the name of Law!" In marched
The Commissary and subordinate.
One glance sufficed them. "A marital pair:
We certify, and bid good morning, sir!
Madame, a thousand pardons!" Whereupon
Monsieur Ulysse Muhlhausen, otherwise
Called "Gustave" for convenience of trade,
Deposing in due form complaint of wrong,
Made his demand of remedy– divorce
From bed, board, share of name, and part in goods.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda owned his fault,
Protested his pure ignorance, from first

To last, of rights infringed in " Gustave's " case :
Submitted him to judgment. Law decreed
" Body and goods be henceforth separate ! "
And thereupon each party took its way,
This right, this left, rejoicing, to abide
Estranged yet amicable, opposites
In life as in respective dwelling-place.
Still does one read on his establishment
Huge-lettered " Gustave,"—gold out-glittering
" Miranda, goldsmith," just across the street—
" A first-rate hand at riding-habits "—say
The instructed—" special cut of chamber-robes."

Thus by a rude in seeming—rightlier judged
Beneficent surprise, publicity
Stopped further fear and trembling, and what tale
Cowardice thinks a covert : one bold splash
Into the mid-shame, and the shiver ends,
Though cramp and drowning may begin perhaps.

To cite just one more point which crowned success
Madame, Miranda's mother, most of all
An obstacle to his projected life
In licence, as a daughter of the Church,
Duteous, exemplary, severe by right—
Moreover one most thoroughly beloved

Without a rival till the other sort
Possessed her son,—first storm of anger spent,
She seemed, though grumblingly and grudgingly,
To let be what needs must be, acquiesce.
"With Heaven—accommodation possible!"
Saint Sganarelle had preached with such effect,
She saw now mitigating circumstance.
"The erring one was most unfortunate,
No question: but worse Magdalens repent.
Were Clara free, did only Law allow,
What fitter choice in marriage could have made
Léonce or anybody?" 'T is alleged
And evidenced, I find, by advocate
"Never did she consider such a tie
As baleful, springe to snap whate'er the cost."
And when the couple were in safety once
At Clairvaux, motherly, considerate,
She shrank not from advice. "Since safe you be,
Safely abide! for winter, I know well,
Is troublesome in a cold country-house.
I recommend the south room, that we styled,
Your sire and I, the winter-chamber."

Chance
Or purpose,—who can read the mystery?—
Combined, I say, to bid "Entrench yourself,

Monsieur Léonce Miranda, on this turf,
About this flower, so firmly that, as tent
Rises on every side around you both,
The question shall become,—Which arrogates
Stability, this tent or those far towers?
May not the temporary structure suit
The stable circuit, co-exist in peace?—
Always until the proper time, no fear!
'Lay flat your tent!' is easier said than done."

So, with the best of auspices, betook
Themselves Léonce Miranda and his bride—
Provisionary—to their Clairvaux house,
Never to leave it—till the proper time.

I told you what was Clairvaux-Priory
Ere the improper time: an old demesne
With memories,—relic half, and ruin whole,—
The very place, then, to repair the wits
Worn out with Paris-traffic, when its lord,
Miranda's father, took his month of ease
Purchased by industry. What contrast here!
Repose, and solitude, and healthy ways.
That ticking at the back of head, he took
For motion of an inmate, stopped at once,
Proved nothing but the pavement's rattle left

Behind at Paris: here was holiday.
Welcome the quaint succeeding to the spruce,
The large and lumbersome and—might he breathe
In whisper to his own ear—dignified
And gentry-fashioned old-style haunts of sleep!
Palatial gloomy chambers for parade,
And passage-lengths of lost significance,
Never constructed as receptacle,
At his odd hours, for him their actual lord
By dint of diamond-dealing, goldsmithry.
Therefore Miranda's father chopped and changed
Nor roof-tile nor yet floor-brick, undismayed
By rains a-top or rats at bottom there.
Such contrast is so piquant for a month!
But now arrived quite other occupants
Whose cry was "Permanency,—life and death
Here, here, not elsewhere, change is all we dread!"
Their dwelling-place must be adapted, then,
To inmates, no mere truants from the town,
No temporary sojourners, forsooth,
At Clairvaux: change it into Paradise!

Fair friend,—who listen and let talk, alas!—
You would, in even such a state of things,
Pronounce,—or am I wrong?—for bidding stay
The old-world inconvenience, fresh as found.

All folk of individuality
Prefer to be reminded now and then,
Though at the cost of vulgar cosiness,
That the shell-outside only harbours man
The vital and progressive, meant to build,
When build he may, with quite a difference,
Some time, in that far land we dream about,
Where every man is his own architect.
But then the couple here in question, each
At one in project for a happy life,
Were by no acceptation of the word
So individual that they must aspire
To architecture all-appropriate
And, therefore, in this world impossible:
They needed house to suit the circumstance,
Proprietors, not tenants for a term.
Despite a certain marking, here and there,
Of fleecy black or white distinguishment,
These vulgar sheep wore the flock's uniform.
They love the country, *they* renounce the town?
They gave a kick, as our Italians say,
To Paris ere it turned and kicked themselves!
Acquaintances might prove too hard to seek,
Or the reverse of hard to find, perchance,
Since Monsieur Gustave's apparition there.
And let me call remark upon the list

Of notabilities invoked, in Court
At Vire, to witness, by their phrases culled
From correspondence, what was the esteem
Of those we pay respect to, for "the pair
Whereof they knew the inner life," 't is said.
Three, and three only, answered the appeal.
First, Monsieur Vaillant, music-publisher,
"Begs Madame will accept civilities."
Next, Alexandre Dumas,—sire, not son,—
"Sends compliments to Madame and to you."
And last—but now prepare for England's voice!
I will not mar nor make—here 's word for word—
"A rich proprietor of Paris, he
To whom belonged that beauteous *Bagatelle*
Close to the wood of Boulogne, Hertford hight,
Assures of homages and compliments
Affectionate"—not now Miranda but
"Madame Muhlhausen." (Was this friend, the Duke
Redoubtable in rivalry before?)
Such was the evidence when evidence
Was wanted, then if ever, to the worth
Whereat acquaintances in Paris prized
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's household charm.
No wonder, then, his impulse was to live,
In Norman solitude, the Paris life:

Surround himself with Art transported thence,
And nature like those famed Elysian Fields:
Then, warm up the right colour out of both,
By Boulevard friendships tempted to come taste
How Paris lived again in little there.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda practised Art.
Do let a man for once live as man likes!
Politics? Spend your life, to spare the world's:
Improve each unit by some particle
Of joy the more, deteriorate the orb
Entire, your own: poor profit, dismal loss!
Write books, paint pictures, or make music—since
Your nature leans to such life-exercise!
Ay, but such exercise begins too soon,
Concludes too late, demands life whole and sole
Artistry being battle with the age
It lives in! Half life,—silence, while you learn
What has been done; the other half,—attempt
At speech, amid world's wail of wonderment—
"Here 's something done was never done before!"
To be the very breath that moves the age
Means not to have breath drive you bubble-like
Before it—but yourself to blow: that 's strain;
Strain 's worry through the life-time, till there 's peace;
We know where peace expects the artist-soul.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much.
Therefore in Art he nowise cared to be
Creative; but creation, that had birth
In storminess long years before was born
Monsieur Léonce Miranda,—Art, enjoyed
Like fleshly objects of the chace that tempt
In cookery, not in capture—these might feast
The dilettante, furnish tavern-fare
Open to all with purses open too.
To sit free and take tribute *seigneur*-like—
Now, not too lavish of acknowledgment,
Now, self-indulgently profuse of pay,
Always Art's *seigneur*, not Art's serving-man
Whate'er the style and title and degree,—
That is the quiet life and easy death
Monsieur Léonce Miranda would approve
Wholly—provided (back I go again
To the first simile) that while glasses clink,
And viands steam, and banqueting laughs high,
All that 's outside the temporary tent,
The dim grim outline of the circuit-wall,
Forgets to menace "Soon or late will drop
Pavilion, soon or late you needs must march,
And laggards will be sorry they were slack!
Always—unless excuse sound plausible!"

Monsieur Léonce Miranda knew as much:
Whence his determination just to paint
So creditably as might help the eye
To comprehend how painter's eye grew dim
Ere it produced L'Ingegno's piece of work—
So to become musician that his ear
Should judge, by its own tickling and turmoil,
Who made the Solemn Mass might well die deaf—
So cultivate a literary knack
That, by experience how it wiles the time,
He might imagine how a poet, rapt
In rhyming wholly, grew so poor at last
By carelessness about his banker's-book,
That the Sieur Boileau (to provoke our smile)
Began abruptly,—when he paid devoir
To Louis Quatorze as he dined in state,—
"Sire, send a drop of broth to Pierre Corneille
Now dying and in want of sustenance!"
—I say, these half-hour playings at life's toil,
Diversified by billiards, riding, sport—
With now and then a visitor—Dumas,
Hertford—to check no aspiration's flight—
While Clara, like a diamond in the dark,
Should extract shining from what else were shade,
And multiply chance rays a million-fold,—
How could he doubt that all offence outside,—

Wrong to the towers, which, pillowed on the turf,
He thus shut eyes to,—were as good as gone?

So, down went Clairvaux-Priory to dust,
And up there rose, in lieu, yon structure gay
Above the Norman ghosts: and where the stretch
Of barren country girdled house about,
Behold the Park, the English preference!
Thus made undoubtedly a desert smile
Monsieur Léonce Miranda.

Ay, but she?
One should not so merge soul in soul, you think?
And I think: only, let us wait, nor want
Two things at once—her turn will come in time.
A cork-float danced upon the tide, we saw,
This morning, blinding-bright with briny dews:
There was no disengaging soaked from sound,
Earth-product from the sister-element.
But when we turn, the tide will turn, I think,
And bare on beach will lie exposed the buoy:
A very proper time to try, with foot
And even finger, which was buoying wave,
Which merely buoyant substance,—power to lift.
And power to be sent skyward passively.
Meanwhile, no separation of the pair!

III.

And so slipt pleasantly away five years
Of Paradisiac dream; till, as there flit
Premonitory symptoms, pricks of pain,
Because the dreamer has to start awake
And find disease dwelt active all the while
In head or stomach through his night-long sleep,—
So happened here disturbance to content.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda's last of cares,
Ere he composed himself, had been to make
Provision that, while sleeping safe he lay,
Somebody else should, dragon-like, let fall
Never a lid, coiled round the apple-stem,
But watch the precious fruitage. Somebody
Kept shop, in short, played Paris-substitute.
Himself, shrewd, well-trained, early-exercised,
Could take in, at an eye-glance, luck or loss—
Know commerce throve, though lazily uplift
On elbow merely: leave his bed, forsooth?
Such active service was the substitute's.

But one October morning, at first drop
Of appled gold, first summons to be grave
Because rough Autumn's play turns earnest now,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda was required
In Paris to take counsel, face to face,
With Madame-mother : and be rated, too,
Roundly at certain items of expense
Whereat the government provisional,
The Paris substitute and shopkeeper,
Shook head, and talked of funds inadequate :
Oh, in the long run,—not if remedy
Occurred betimes ! Else,—tap the generous bole
Too near the quick,—it withers to the root—
Leafy, prolific, golden apple-tree,
"Miranda," sturdy in the Place Vendôme !

"What is this reckless life you lead?" began
Her greeting she whom most he feared and loved,
Madame Miranda. "Luxury, extravagance
Sardanapalus' self might emulate,—
Did your good father's money go for this?
Where are the fruits of education, where
The morals which at first distinguished you,
The faith which promised to adorn your age?
And why such wastefulness outbreaking now,
When heretofore you loved economy?

Explain this pulling-down and building-up
Poor Clairvaux, which your father bought because
Clairvaux he found it, and so left to you,
Not a gilt-gingerbread big baby-house !
True, we could somehow shake head and shut eye
To what was past prevention on our part—
This reprehensible illicit bond :
We, in a manner, winking, watched consort
Our modest well-conducted pious son
With Dalilah : we thought the smoking flax
Would smoulder soon away and end in snuff.
Is spark to strengthen, prove consuming fire?
No lawful family calls Clairvaux 'home'—
Why play that fool of Scripture whom the voice
Admonished 'Whose to-night shall be those things
Provided for thy morning jollity?'
To take one specimen of pure caprice
Out of the heap conspicuous in the plan,—
Puzzle of change, I call it,—titled big
'Clairvaux Restored:' what means this Belvedere?
This Tower, stuck like a fool's-cap on the roof—
Do you intend to soar to heaven from thence?
Tower, truly ! Better had you planted turf—
More fitly would you dig yourself a hole
Beneath it for the final journey's help !
O we poor parents—could we prophesy ! "

Léonce was found affectionate enough
To man, to woman, child, bird, beast, alike;
But all affection, all one fire of heart
Flaming toward Madame-mother. Had she posed
The question plainly at the outset "Choose!
Cut clean in half your all-the-world of love,
The mother and the mistress: then resolve,
Take me or take her, throw away the one!"—
He might have made the choice and marred my tale.
But, much I apprehend, the problem put
Was "Keep both halves, yet do no detriment
To either! Prize each opposite in turn!"
Hence, while he prized at worth the Clairvaux-life
With all its tolerated naughtiness,
He, visiting in fancy Quai Rousseau,
Saw, cornered in the cosiest nook of all
That range of rooms through number Thirty-three,
The lady-mother bent o'er her *bézique*;
While Monsieur Curé This, and Sister That—
Superior of no matter what good House—
Did duty for Duke Hertford and Dumas,
Nay—at his mother's age—for Clara's self.
At Quai Rousseau, things comfortable thus,
Why should poor Clairvaux prove so troublesome?
She played at cards, he built a Belvedere.
But here 's the difference: she had reached the Towers

And there took pastime: he was still on Turf—
Though fully minded that, when once he marched,
No sportive fancy should distract him more.

In brief, the man was angry with himself,
With her, with all the world and much beside:
And so the unseemly words were interchanged
Which crystallize what else evaporates,
And make mere misty petulance grow hard
And sharp inside each softness, heart and soul.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda flung at last
Out of doors, fever-flushed: and there the Seine
Rolled at his feet, obsequious remedy
For fever, in a cold Autumnal flow.
"Go and be rid of memory in a bath!"
Craftily whispered Who besets the ear
On such occasions.

Done as soon as dreamed.
Back shivers poor Léonce to bed—where else?
And there he lies a month 'twixt life and death,
Raving. "Remorse of conscience!" friends opine.
"Sirs, it may partly prove so," represents
Beaumont—(the family physician, he
Whom last year's Commune murdered, do you mind?)
Beaumont reports "There is some active cause,

More than mere pungency of quarrel past,—
Cause that keeps adding other food to fire.
I hear the words and know the signs, I say!
Dear Madame, you have read the Book of Saints,
How Antony was tempted? As for me,
Poor heathen, 't is by pictures I am taught.
I say then, I see standing here,—between
Me and my patient, and that crucifix
You very properly would interpose,—
A certain woman-shape, one white appeal
'Will you leave me, then, me, me, me for her?'
Since cold Seine could not quench this flame, since flare
Of fever does not redden it away,—
Be rational, indulgent, mute—should chance
Come to the rescue—Providence, I mean—
The while I blister and phlebotomize!"

Well, somehow rescued by whatever power,
At month's end, back again conveyed himself
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags,
Nay, tinder: stuff irreparably spoiled,
Though kindly hand should stitch and patch its best.
Clairvaux in Autumn is restorative.
A friend stitched on, patched ever. All the same,
Clairvaux looked greyer than a month ago.

Unglossed was shrubbery, unglorified
Each copse, so wealthy once ; the garden-plots,
The orchard-walks showed dearth and dreariness.
The sea lay out at distance crammed by cloud
Into a leaden wedge ; and sorrowful
Sulked field and pasture with persistent rain.
Nobody came so far from Paris now :
Friends did their duty by an invalid
Whose convalescence claimed entire repose.
Only a single ministrant was staunch
At quiet reparation of the stuff—
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, worn to rags :
But she was Clara and the world beside.

Another month, the year packed up his plagues
And sullenly departed, pedlar-like,
As apprehensive old-world ware might show
To disadvantage when the new-comer,
Merchant of novelties, young 'Sixty-eight,
With brand-new bargains, whistled o'er the lea.
Things brightened somewhat o'er the Christmas hearth,
As Clara plied assiduously her task.

"Words are but words and wind. Why let the wind
Sing in your ear, bite, sounding, to your brain ?
Old folk and young folk, still at odds, of course !

Age quarrels because spring puts forth a leaf
While winter has a mind that boughs stay bare;
Or rather—worse than quarrel—age descries
Propriety in preaching life to death.
'Enjoy nor youth, nor Clairvaux, nor poor me?'
Dear Madame, you enjoy your age, 't is thought!
Your number Thirty-three on Quai Rousseau
Cost fifty times the price of Clairvaux, tipped
Even with our prodigious Belvedere;
You entertain the Curé,—we, Dumas:
We play charades, while you prefer *bézique*:
Do lead your own life and let ours alone!
Cross Old Year shall have done his worst, my friend!
Here comes gay New Year with a gift, no doubt.
Look up and let in light that longs to shine—
One flash of light, and where will darkness hide?
Your cold makes me too cold, love! Keep me warm!"

Whereat Léonce Miranda raised his head
From his two white thin hands, and forced a smile,
And spoke: "I do look up, and see your light
Above me! Let New Year contribute warmth—
I shall refuse no fuel that may blaze."
Nor did he. Three days after, just a spark
From Paris, answered by a snap at Caen
Or whither reached the telegraphic wire:

"Quickly to Paris! On arrival, learn
Why you are wanted!" Curt and critical!

Off starts Léonce, one fear from head to foot;
Caen, Rouen, Paris, as the railway helps;
Then come the Quai and Number Thirty-three.
"What is the matter, concierge?"—a grimace!
He mounts the staircase, makes for the main seat
Of dreadful mystery which draws him there—
Bursts in upon a bedroom known too well—
There lies all left now of the mother once.
Tapers define the stretch of rigid white,
Nor want there ghastly velvets of the grave.
A blackness sits on either side at watch,
Sisters, good souls but frightful all the same,
Silent: a priest is spokesman for his corpse.
"Dead, through Léonce Miranda! stricken down
Without a minute's warning, yesterday!
What did she say to you, and you to her,
Two months ago? This is the consequence!
The doctors have their name for the disease;
I, you, and God say—heart-break, nothing more!"
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, like a stone
Fell at the bedfoot and found respite so,
While the priest went to tell the company.
What follows you are free to disbelieve.

It may be true or false that this good priest
Had taken his instructions,—who shall blame?—
From quite another quarter than, perchance,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda might suppose
Would offer solace in such pressing need.
All he remembered of his kith and kin
Was they were worthily his substitutes
In commerce, did their work and drew their pay.
But *they* remembered, in addition, this—
They fairly might expect inheritance,
As nearest kin, called Family by law
And gospel both. Now, since Miranda's life
Showed nothing like abatement of distaste
For conjugality, but preference
Continued and confirmed of that smooth chain
Which slips and leaves no knot behind, no heir—
Presumption was, the man, become mature,
Would at a calculable day discard
His old and outworn . . . what we blush to name,
And make society the just amends;
Scarce by a new attachment—Heaven forbid!
Still less by lawful marriage: that 's reserved
For those who make a proper choice at first—
Not try both courses and would grasp in age
The very treasure youth preferred to spurn.
No! putting decently such thought aside,

The penitent must rather give his powers
To such a reparation of the past
As, edifying kindred, makes them rich.
Now, how would it enrich prospectively
The Cousins, if he lavished such expense
On Clairvaux?—pretty as a toy, but then
As toy, so much productive and no more!
If all the outcome of the goldsmith's shop
Went to gild Clairvaux, where remain the funds
For Cousinry to spread out lap and take?
This must be thought of and provided for.
I give it you as mere conjecture, mind!
To help explain the wholesome unannounced
Intelligence, the shock that startled guilt,
The scenic show, much yellow, black and white
By taper-shine, the nuns—portentous pair,
And, more than all, the priest's admonishment—
"No flattery of self! You murdered her!
The grey lips, silent now, reprove by mine.
You wasted all your living, rioted
In harlotry—she warned and I repeat!
No warning had she, for she needed none:
If this should be the last yourself receive?"
Done for the best, no doubt, though clumsily,—
Such, and so startling, the reception here,
You hardly wonder if down fell at once

The tawdry tent, pictorial, musical,
Poetical, besprent with hearts and darts;
Its cobweb-work, betinseled stitchery,
Lay dust about our sleeper on the turf,
And showed the outer towers distinct and dread.

Senseless he fell, and long he lay, and much
Seemed salutary in his punishment
To planners and performers of the piece.
When pain ends, pardon prompt may operate.
There was a good attendance close at hand,
Waiting the issue in the great saloon,
Cousins with consolation and advice.

All things thus happily performed to point,
No wonder at success commensurate.
Once swooning stopped, once anguish subsequent
Raved out,—a sudden resolution chilled
His blood and changed his swimming eyes to stone.
As the poor fellow raised himself upright,
Collected strength, looked, once for all, his look,
Then, turning, put officious help aside
And passed from out the chamber. "For affairs!"
So he announced himself to the saloon:
"We owe a duty to the living too!"—
Monsieur Léonce Miranda tried to smile.

How did the hearts of Cousinry rejoice
At their stray sheep returning thus to fold,
As, with a dignity, precision, sense,
All unsuspected in the man before,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda made minute
Detail of his intended scheme of life
Thenceforward and for ever. "Vanity
Was ended: its redemption must begin—
And, certain, would continue; but since life
Was awfully uncertain—witness here!—
Behoved him lose no moment but discharge
Immediate burthen of the world's affairs
On backs that kindly volunteered to crouch.
Cousins, with easier conscience, blamelessly
Might carry on the goldsmith's trade, in brief,
Uninterfered with by its lord who late
Was used to supervise and take due tithe.
A stipend now sufficed his natural need:
Themselves should fix what sum allows man live.
But half a dozen words concisely plain
Might, first of all, make sure that, on demise,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's property
Passed by bequeathment, every particle,
To the right heirs, the cousins of his heart.
As for that woman—they would understand!
This was a step must take her by surprise.

It were too cruel did he snatch away
Decent subsistence. She was young, and fair,
And . . . and attractive! Means must be supplied
To save her from herself, and from the world,
And . . . from anxieties might haunt him else
When he were fain have other thoughts in mind."

It was a sight to melt a stone, that thaw
Of rigid disapproval into dew
Of sympathy, as each extended palm
Of cousin hasted to enclose those five
Cold fingers, tendered so mistrustfully,
Despairingly of condonation now!
You would have thought,—at every fervent shake,
In reassurance of those timid tips,—
The penitent had squeezed, considerate,
By way of fee into physician's hand
For physicking his soul, some diamond knob.

And now let pass a week. Once more behold
The same assemblage in the same saloon,
Waiting the entry of protagonist
Monsieur Léonce Miranda. "Just a week
Since the death-day,—was ever man transformed
Like this man?" questioned cousin of his mate.
Last seal to the repentance had been set

Three days before, at Sceaux in neighbourhood
Of Paris, where they laid with funeral pomp
Mother by father. Let me spare the rest:
How the poor fellow, in his misery,
Buried hot face and bosom, where heaped snow
Offered assistance, at the grave's black edge,
And there lay, till uprooted by main force
From where he prayed to grow and ne'er again
Walk earth unworthily as heretofore.
It is not with impunity priests teach
The doctrine he was dosed with from his youth—
"Pain to the body—profit to the soul;
Corporeal pleasure—so much woe to pay
When disembodied spirit gives account."
However, woe had done its worst, this time.
Three days allow subsidence of much grief.
Already, regular and equable,
Forward went purpose to effect. At once
The testament was written, signed and sealed.
Disposure of the commerce—that took time,
And would not suffer by a week's delay;
But the immediate, the imperious need,
The call demanding of the Cousinry
Co-operation, what convened them thus,
Was—how and when should deputation march
To Coliseum Street, the old abode

Of wickedness, and there acquaint—oh, shame!
Her, its old inmate, who had followed up
And lay in wait in the old haunt for prey—
That they had rescued, they possessed Léonce,
Whose loathing at recapture equalled theirs—
Upbraid that sinner with her sinfulness,
Impart the fellow-sinner's firm resolve
Never to set eyes on her face again:
Then, after stipulations strict but just,
Hand her the first instalment,—moderate
Enough, no question,—of her salary:
Admonish for the future, and so end.—
All which good purposes, decided on
Sufficiently, were waiting full effect
When presently the culprit should appear.

Somehow appearance was delayed too long;
Chatting and chirping sunk inconsciously
To silence, nay, uneasiness, at length
Alarm, till—anything for certitude!—
A peeper was commissioned to explore,
At keyhole, what the laggard's task might be—
What caused so palpable a disrespect!

Back came the tiptoe cousin from his quest.
"Monsieur Léonce was busy," he believed,

"Contemplating—those love-letters, perhaps,
He always carried, as if precious stones,
About with him. He read, one after one,
Some sort of letters. But his back was turned.
The empty coffer open at his side,
He leant on elbow by the mantelpiece
Before the hearth-fire; big and blazing too."

"Better he shovelled them all in at once,
And burned the rubbish!" was a cousin's quip,
Warming his own hands at the fire the while.
I told you, snow had fallen outside, I think.

When suddenly a cry, a host of cries,
Screams, hubbub and confusion thrilled the room.
All by a common impulse rushed thence, reached
The late death-chamber, tricked with trappings still,
Skulls, cross-bones, and such moral broidery.
Madame Muhlhausen might have played the witch,
Dropped down the chimney and appalled Léonce
By some proposal "Parting touch of hand!"
If she but touched his foolish hand, you know!!

Something had happened quite contrariwise.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, one by one,
Had read the letters and the love they held,

And, that task finished, had required his soul
To answer frankly what the prospect seemed
Of his own love's departure—pledged to part!
Then, answer being unmistakable,
He had replaced the letters quietly,
Shut coffer, and so, grasping either side
By its convenient handle, plunged the whole—
Letters and coffer and both hands to boot,
Into the burning grate and held them there.
"Burn, burn and purify my past!" said he,
Calmly, as if he felt no pain at all.

In vain they pulled him from the torture-place:
The strong man, with the soul of tenfold strength,
Broke from their clutch: and there again smiled he,
The miserable hands re-bathed in fire—
Constant to that ejaculation "Burn,
Burn, purify!" And when, combining force,
They fairly dragged the victim out of reach
Of further harm, he had no hands to hurt—
Two horrible remains of right and left,
"Whereof the bones, phalanges formerly,
Carbonized, were still crackling with the flame,"
Said Beaumont. And he fought them all the while:
"Why am I hindered when I would be pure?
Why leave the sacrifice still incomplete?

She holds me, I must have more hands to burn!"
They were the stronger, though, and bound him fast.

Beaumont was in attendance presently.
"What did I tell you? Preachment to the deaf!
I wish he had been deafer when they preached,
Those priests! But wait till next Republic comes!"

As for Léonce, a single sentiment
Possessed his soul and occupied his tongue—
Absolute satisfaction at the deed.
Never he varied, 't is observable,
Nor in the stage of agonies (which proved
Absent without leave,—science seemed to think)
Nor yet in those three months' febricity
Which followed,—never did he vary tale—
Remaining happy beyond utterance.
"Ineffable beatitude"—I quote
The words, I cannot give the smile—"such bliss
Abolished pain! Pain might or might not be:
He felt in heaven, where flesh desists to fret.
Purified now and henceforth, all the past
Reduced to ashes with the flesh defiled!
Why all those anxious faces round his bed?
What was to pity in their patient, pray,
When doctor came and went, and Cousins watched?

—Kindness, but in pure waste!" he said and smiled.
And if a trouble would at times disturb
The ambrosial mood, it came from other source
Than the corporeal transitory pang.
"If sacrifice be incomplete!" cried he—
"If ashes have not sunk reduced to dust,
To nullity! If atoms coalesce
Till something grow, grow, get to be a shape
I hate, I hoped to burn away from me!
She is my body, she and I are one,
Yet, all the same, there, there at bed-foot stands
The woman wound about my flesh and blood,
There, the arms open, the more wonderful,
The whiter for the burning . . . Vanish thou!
Avaunt, fiend's self found in the form I wore!"

"Whereat," said Beaumont, "since his hands were gone,
The patient in a frenzy kicked and licked
To keep off some imagined visitant.
So will it prove as long as priests may preach
Spiritual terrors!" groaned the evidence
Of Beaumont that his patient was stark mad—
Produced in time and place: of which anon.
"Mad, or why thus insensible to pain?
Body and soul are one thing, with two names
For more or less elaborated stuff."

Such is the new *Religio Medici.*
Though antiquated faith held otherwise,
Explained that body is not soul, but just
Soul's servant: that, if soul be satisfied,
Possess already joy or pain enough,
It uses to ignore, as master may,
What increase, joy or pain, its servant brings—
Superfluous contribution: soul, once served,
Has nought to do with body's service more.
Each, speculated on exclusively,
As if its office were the only one,
Body or soul, either shows service paid
In joy and pain, that's blind and objectless—
A servant's toiling for no master's good—
Or else shows good received and put to use,
As if within soul's self grew joy and pain,
Nor needed body for a ministrant.
I note these old unscientific ways:
Poor Beaumont cannot: for the Commune ruled
Next year, and ere they shot his priests, shot him.

Monsieur Léonce Miranda raved himself
To rest; lay three long months in bliss or bale,
Inactive, anyhow: more need that heirs,
His natural protectors, should assume
The management, bestir their cousinship,

And carry out that purpose of reform
Such tragic work now made imperative.
A deputation, with austerity,
Nay, sternness, bore her sentence to the fiend
Aforesaid,—she at watch for turn of wheel
And fortune's favour, Street—you know the name.
A certain roughness seemed appropriate: "You—
Steiner, Muhlhausen, whatsoe'er your name,
Cause whole and sole of this catastrophe!"—
And so forth, introduced the embassage.

"Monsieur Léonce Miranda was divorced
Once and for ever from his—ugly word.
Himself had gone for good to Portugal:
They came empowered to act and stipulate.
Hold! no discussion! Terms were settled now:
So much of present and prospective pay,
But also—good engagement in plain terms
She never seek renewal of the past!"

This little harmless tale produced effect.
Madame Muhlhausen owned her sentence just,
Its execution gentle. "Stern their phrase,
These kinsfolk with a right she recognized—
But kind its import probably, which now
Her agitation, her bewilderment

Rendered too hard to understand, perhaps.
Let them accord the natural delay,
And she would ponder and decide. Meantime,
So far was she from wish to follow friend
Who fled her, that she would not budge from place—
Now that her friend was fled to Portugal,—
Never! *She* leave this Coliseum Street?
No, not a footstep!" she assured them.

So—
They saw they might have left that tale untold
When, after some weeks more were gone to waste,
Recovery seemed incontestable,
And the poor mutilated figure, once
The gay and glancing fortunate young spark,
Miranda, humble and obedient took
The doctor's counsel, issued sad and slow
From precincts of the sick-room, tottered down,
And out, and into carriage for fresh air,
And so drove straight to Coliseum Street,
And tottered upstairs, knocked, and in a trice
Was clasped in the embrace of whom you know—
With much asseveration, I omit,
Of constancy henceforth till life should end.
When all this happened,—"What reward," cried she,
"For judging her Miranda by herself!

For never having entertained a thought
Of breaking promise, leaving home forsooth,
To follow who was fled to Portugal!
As if she thought they spoke a word of truth!
She knew what love was, knew that he loved her;
The Cousinry knew nothing of the kind."

I will not scandalize you and recount
How matters made the morning pass away.
Not one reproach, not one acknowledgment,
One explanation: all was understood!
Matters at end, the home-uneasiness
Cousins were feeling at this jaunt prolonged
Was ended also by the entry of—
Not simply him whose exit had been made
By mild command of doctor "Out with you!
I warrant we receive another man!"
But—would that I could say, the married pair!
And, quite another man assuredly,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda took on him
Forthwith to bid the trio, priest and nuns,
Constant in their attendance all this while,
Take his thanks and their own departure too;
Politely but emphatically. Next,
The Cousins were dismissed: "No protest, pray!
Whatever I engaged to do is done,

Or shall be—I but follow your advice :
Love I abjure : the lady, you behold,
Is changed as I myself; her sex is changed :
This is my Brother—He will tend me now,
Be all my world henceforth as brother should.
Gentlemen, of a kinship I revere,
Your interest in trade is laudable;
I purpose to indulge it : manage mine,
My goldsmith-business in the Place Vendôme,
Wholly—through purchase at the price adjudged
By experts I shall have assistance from.
If, in conformity with sage advice,
I leave a busy world of interests
I own myself unfit for—yours the care
That any world of other aims, wherein
I hope to dwell, be easy of access
Through ministration of the moneys due,
As we determine, with all proper speed,
Since I leave Paris to repair my health.
Say farewell to our Cousins, Brother mine!"

And, all submissiveness, as brother might,
The lady curtseyed gracefully, and dropt
More than mere curtsey, a concluding phrase
So silver-soft, yet penetrative too,
That none of it escaped the favoured ears :

" Had I but credited one syllable,
I should to-day be lying stretched on straw,
The produce of your miserable *rente* !
Whereas, I hold him—do you comprehend?"
Cousin regarded cousin, turned up eye,
And took departure, as our Tuscans laugh,
Each with his added palm-breadth of long nose,—
Curtailed but imperceptibly, next week,
When transfer was accomplished, and the trade
In Paris did indeed become their own,
But bought by them and sold by him on terms
'Twixt man and man,—might serve 'twixt wolf and wolf,
Substitute "bit and clawed" for "signed and sealed"—
Our ordinary business-terms, in short.
Another week, and Clairvaux broke in bloom
At end of April, to receive again
Monsieur Léonce Miranda, gentleman,
Ex-jeweller and goldsmith: never more,—
According to the purpose he professed,—
To quit this paradise, his property,
This Clara, his companion: so it proved.

The Cousins, each with elongated nose,
Discussed their bargain, reconciled them soon
To hard necessity, disbursed the cash,
And hastened to subjoin, wherever type

Proclaimed "Miranda" to the public, "Called
Now Firm-Miranda." There, a colony,
They flourish underneath the name that still
Maintains the old repute, I understand.
They built their Clairvaux, dream-Château, in Spain,
Perhaps—but Place Vendôme is waking worth
Oh, they lost little!—only, man and man
Hardly conclude transactions of the kind
As cousin should with cousin,—cousins think.
For the rest, all was honourably done,
So, ere buds break to blossom, let us breathe!
Never suppose there was one particle
Of recrudescence—wound, half-healed before,
Set freshly running—sin, repressed as such,
New loosened as necessity of life!
In all this revocation and resolve,
Far be sin's self-indulgence from your thought!
The man had simply made discovery,
By process I respect if not admire,
That what was, was:—that turf, his feet had touched,
Felt solid just as much as yonder towers
He saw with eyes, but did not stand upon,
And could not, if he would, reach in a leap.
People had told him flowery turf was false
To footstep, tired the traveller soon, beside:
That was untrue. They told him "One fair stride

Plants on safe platform and secures man rest."
That was untrue. Some varied the advice:
"Neither was solid, towers no more than turf."
Double assertion, therefore twice as false.
"I like these amateurs"—our friend had laughed,
Could he turn what he felt to what he thought,
And, that again, to what he put in words:
"I like their pretty trial, proof of paste
Or precious stone, by delicate approach
Of eye askance, fine feel of finger-tip,
Or touch of tongue inquisitive for cold.
I tried my jewels in a crucible:
Fierce fire has felt them, licked them, left them sound.
Don't tell me that my earthly love is sham,
My heavenly fear a clever counterfeit!
Each may oppose each, yet be true alike!"

To build up, independent of the towers,
A durable pavilion o'er the turf,
Had issued in disaster. "What remained
Except, by tunnel, or else gallery,
To keep communication 'twixt the two,
Unite the opposites, both near and far,
And never try complete abandonment
Of one or other?" so he thought, not said.
And to such engineering feat, I say,

Monsieur Léonce Miranda saw the means
Precisely in this revocation prompt
Of just those benefits of worldly wealth
Conferred upon his Cousinry—all but!

This Clairvaux—you would know, were you at top
Of yonder crowning grace, its Belvedere—
Is situate in one angle-niche of three
At equidistance from Saint-Rambert—there
Behind you, and The Ravissante, beside—
There: steeple, steeple, and this Clairvaux-top,
(A sort of steeple) constitute a trine,
With not a tenement to break each side,
Two miles or so in length, if eye can judge.
Now, this is native land of miracle.
O why, why, why, from all recorded time,
Was miracle not wrought once, only once,
To help whoever wanted help indeed?
If on the day when Spring's green girlishness
Grew nubile and she trembled into May,
And our Miranda climbed to clasp the Spring
A-tiptoe o'er the sea, those wafts of warmth,
Those cloudlets scudding under the bare blue,
And all that new sun, that fresh hope about
His airy place of observation,—friend,
Feel with me that if just then, just for once,

Some angel,—such as the authentic pen
Yonder records a daily visitant
Of ploughman Claude, rheumatic in the joints,
And spinster Jeanne, with megrim troubled sore,—
If such an angel, with nought else to do,
Had taken station on the pinnacle
And simply said "Léonce, look straight before!
Neither to right hand nor to left: for why?
Being a stupid soul, you want a guide
To turn the goodness in you to account
And make stupidity submit itself.
Go to Saint-Rambert! Straightway get such guide!
There stands a man of men. You, jeweller,
Must needs have heard how once the biggest block
Of diamond now in Europe lay exposed
Mid specimens of stone and earth and ore,
On huckster's stall,—Navona names the Square,
And Rome the city for the incident,—
Labelled 'quartz-crystal, price one halfpenny.'
Haste and secure that ha'p'worth, on your life!
That man will read you rightly head to foot,
Mark the brown face of you, the bushy beard,
The breadth 'twixt shoulderblades, and through each black
Castilian orbit, see into your soul.
Talk to him for five minutes—nonsense, sense,

No matter what—describe your horse, your hound,—
Give your opinion of the policy
Of Monsieur Rouher,—will he succour Rome?
Your estimate of what may outcome be
From Œcumenical Assemblage there!
After which samples of intelligence,
Rapidly run through those events you call
Your past life, tell what once you tried to do,
What you intend on doing this next May!
There he stands, reads an English newspaper,
Stock-still, and now, again upon the move,
Paces the beach to taste the Spring, like you,
Since both are human beings in God's eye.
He will have understood you, I engage.
Endeavour, for your part, to understand
He knows more, and loves better, than the world
That never heard his name, and never may.
He will have recognized, ere breath be spent
And speech at end, how much that 's good in man,
And generous, and self-devoting, makes
Monsieur Léonce Miranda worth his help;
While sounding to the bottom ignorance
Historical and philosophical
And moral and religious, all one couch
Of crassitude, a portent of its kind.
Then, just as he would pityingly teach

Your body to repair maltreatment, give
Advice that you should make those stumps to stir
With artificial hands of caoutchouc,
So would he soon supply your crippled soul
With crutches, from his own intelligence,
Able to help you onward in the path
Of rectitude whereto your face is set,
And counsel justice—to yourself, the first,
To your associate, very like a wife
Or something better,—to the world at large,
Friends, strangers, horses, hounds and Cousinry—
All which amount of justice will include
Justice to God. Go and consult his voice!"
Since angel would not say this simple truth,
What hinders that my heart relieve itself,
Milsand, who makest warm my wintry world,
And wise my heaven, if there we consort too?
Monsieur Léonce Miranda turned, alas,
Or was turned, by no angel, t' other way,
And got him guidance of The Ravissante.

Now, into the originals of faith,
Yours, mine, Miranda's, no inquiry here!
Of faith, as apprehended by mankind,
The causes, were they caught and catalogued,
Would too distract, too desperately foil

Inquirer. How may analyst reduce
Quantities to exact their opposites,
Value to zero, then bring zero back
To value of supreme preponderance
How substitute thing meant for thing expressed?
Detect the wire-thread through that fluffy silk
Men call their rope, their real compulsive power?
Suppose effected such anatomy,
And demonstration made of what belief
Has moved believer—were the consequence
Reward at all? would each man straight deduce,
From proved reality of cause, effect
Conformable—believe and unbelieve
According to your True thus disengaged
From all his heap of False called reason first?

No: hand once used to hold a soft thick twist,
Cannot now grope its way by wire alone·
Childhood may catch the knack, scarce Youth, not Age!
That 's the reply rewards you. Just as well
Remonstrate to yon peasant in the blouse
That, had he justified the true intent
Of Nature who composed him thus and thus,
Weakly or strongly, here he would not stand
Struggling with uncongenial earth and sky,
But elsewhere tread the surface of the globe,

Since one meridian suits the faulty lungs,
Another bids the sluggish liver work.
"Here I was born, for better or for worse:
I did not choose a climate for myself;
Admit, my life were healthy, led elsewhere,"
(He answers) "how am I to migrate, pray?"

Therefore the course to take is—spare your pains,
And trouble uselessly with discontent
Nor soul nor body, by parading proof
That neither haply had known ailment, placed
Precisely where the circumstance forbade
Their lot should fall to either of the pair.
But try and, what you find wrong, remedy,
Accepting the conditions: never ask
"How came you to be born here with those lungs,
That liver?" But bid asthma smoke a pipe,
Stramonium, just as if no Tropics were,
And ply with calomel the sluggish duct,
Nor taunt "The born Norwegian breeds no bile!"
And as with body, so proceed with soul:
Nor less discerningly, where faith you found,
However foolish and fantastic, grudge
To play the doctor and amend mistake,
Because a wisdom were conceivable
Whence faith had sprung robust above disease.

Far beyond human help, that source of things!
Since, in the first stage, so to speak,—first stare
Of apprehension at the invisible,—
Begins divergency of mind from mind,
Superior from inferior: leave this first!
Little you change there! What comes afterward—
From apprehended thing, each inference
With practicality concerning life,
This you may test and try, confirm the right
Or contravene the wrong which reasons there.
The offspring of the sickly faith must prove
Sickly act also: stop a monster-birth!
When water 's in the cup and not the cloud,
Then is the proper time for chemic test:
Belief permits your skill to operate
When, drop by drop condensed from misty heaven,
'T is wrung out, lies a bowlful in the fleece.
How dew by spoonfuls came, let Gideon say:
What purpose water serves, your word or two
May teach him, should he fancy it lights fire.

Concerning, then, our vaporous Ravissante—
How fable first precipitated faith—
Silence you get upon such point from me.
But when I see come posting to the pair
At Clairvaux, for the cure of soul-disease,

This Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,
This Mother of the Convent, Nun I know—
They practise in that second stage of things;
They boast no fresh distillery of faith;
'T is dogma in the bottle, bright and old,
They bring; and I pretend to pharmacy.
They undertake the cure with all my heart!
He trusts them, and they surely trust themselves.
I ask no better. Never mind the cause,
Fons et origo of the malady:
Apply the drug with courage! Here 's our case.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda asks of God,
—May a man, living in illicit tie,
Continue, by connivance of the Church,
No matter what amends he please to make
Short of forthwith relinquishing the sin?
Physicians, what do you propose for cure?

Father and Mother of the Ravissante,
Read your own records, and you find prescribed
As follows, when a couple out of sorts
Rather than gravely suffering, sought your skill
And thereby got their health again. Perpend!
Two and a half good centuries ago,
Luc de la Maison Rouge, a nobleman
Of Claise, (the river gives this country name)

And, just as noblewoman, Maude his wife,
Having been married many happy years
Spent in God's honour and man's service too,
Conceived, while yet in flower of youth and hope,
The project of departing each from each
Forever, and dissolving marriage-bonds
That both might enter a religious life.
Needing, before they came to such resolve,
Divine illumination,—course was clear,—
They visited your church in pilgrimage,
On Christmas morn: communicating straight,
They heard three Masses proper for the day,
"It is incredible with what effect"—
Quoth the Cistercian monk I copy from—
And, next day, came, again communicants,
Again heard Masses manifold, but now
With added thanks to Christ for special grace
And consolation granted: in the night,
Had been divorce from marriage, manifest
By signs and tokens. So, they made great gifts,
Left money for more Masses, and returned
Homeward rejoicing—he, to take the rules,
As Brother Dionysius, Capucin;
She, to become first postulant, then nun
According to the rules of Benedict,
Sister Scolastica: so ended they,

And so do I—not end nor yet commence
One note or comment. What was done was done.
Now, Father of the Mission, here 's your case!
And, Mother of the Convent, here 's its cure!
If separation was permissible,
And that decree of Christ "What God hath joined
Let no man put asunder" nullified
Because a couple, blameless in the world,
Had the conceit that, still more blamelessly,
Out of the world, by breach of marriage-vow,
Their life was like to pass,—you oracles
Of God,—since holy Paul says such you are,—
Hesitate, not one moment, to pronounce
When questioned by the pair now needing help
"Each from the other go, you guilty ones,
Preliminary to your least approach
Nearer the Power that thus could strain a point
In favour of a pair of innocents
Who thought their wedded hands not clean enough
To touch and leave unsullied their souls' snow!
Are not your hands found filthy by the world,
Mere human law and custom? Not a step
Nearer till hands be washed and purified!"

What they did say is immaterial, since
Certainly it was nothing of the kind.

There was no washing hands of him (alack,
You take me?—in the figurative sense!),
But, somehow, gloves were drawn o'er dirt and all,
And practice with the Church procured thereby.
Seeing that,—all remonstrance proved in vain,
Persuasives tried and terrors put to use,
I nowise question,—still the guilty pair
Only embraced the closelier, obstinate,—
Father and Mother went from Clairvaux back
Their weary way, with heaviness of heart,
I grant you, but each palm well crossed with coin,
And nothing like a smutch perceptible.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda might compound
For sin?—no, surely! but by gifts—prepare
His soul the better for contrition, say!
Gift followed upon gift, at all events.
Good counsel was rejected, on one part:
Hard money, on the other—may we hope
Was unreflectingly consigned to purse?

Two years did this experiment engage
Monsieur Léonce Miranda: how, by gifts
To God and to God's poor, a man might stay
In sin and yet stave off sin's punishment.
No salve could be conceived more nicely mixed
For this man's nature: generosity,—

Susceptibility to human ills,
Corporeal, mental,—self-devotedness
Made up Miranda—whether strong or weak
Elsewhere, may be inquired another time.
In mercy he was strong, at all events.
Enough! he could not see a beast in pain,
Much less a man, without the will to aid;
And where the will was, oft the means were too,
Since that good bargain with the Cousinry.

The news flew fast about the countryside
That, with the kind man, it was ask and have;
And ask and have they did. To instance you:—
A mob of beggars at The Ravissante
Clung to his skirts one day, and cried "We thirst!"
Forthwith he bade a cask of wine be broached
To satisfy all comers, till, dead-drunk
So satisfied, they strewed the holy place.
For this was grown religious and a rite:
Such slips of judgment, gifts irregular,
Showed but as spillings of the golden grist
On either side the hopper, through blind zeal;
Steadily the main stream went pouring on
From mill to mouth of sack—held wide and close
By Father of the Mission, Parish-priest,
And Mother of the Convent, Nun I know,

With such effect that, in the sequel, proof
Was tendered to the Court at Vire, last month,
That in these same two years, expenditure
At quiet Clairvaux rose to the amount
Of Forty Thousand English Pounds: whereof
A trifle went, no inappropriate close
Of bounty, to supply the Virgin's crown
With that stupendous jewel from New-York,
Now blazing as befits the Star of Sea.

Such signs of grace, outward and visible,
I rather give you, for your sake and mine,
Than put in evidence the inward strife,
Spiritual effort to compound for fault
By payment of devotion—thank the phrase!
That payment was as punctual, do not doubt,
As its far easier fellow. Yesterday
I trudged the distance from The Ravissante
To Clairvaux, with my two feet: but our friend
The more to edify the country-folk,
Was wont to make that journey on both knees.
"Maliciously perverted incident!"
Snarled the retort, when this was told at Vire:
"The man paid mere devotion as he passed,
Knelt decently at just each wayside shrine!"
Alas, my lawyer, I trudged yesterday—

On my two feet, and with both eyes wide ope,—
The distance, and could find no shrine at all!
According to his lights, I praise the man.
Enough! incessant was devotion, say—
With her, you know of, praying at his side.
Still, there be relaxations of the tense;
Or life indemnifies itself for strain,
Or finds its very strain grow feebleness.
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's days were passed
Much as of old, in simple work and play.
His first endeavour, on recovery
From that sad ineffectual sacrifice,
Had been to set about repairing loss:
Never admitting, loss was to repair.
No word at any time escaped his lips
—Betrayed a lurking presence, in his heart,
Of sorrow; no regret for mischief done—
Punishment suffered, he would rather say.
Good-tempered schoolboy-fashion, he preferred
To laugh away his flogging, fair price paid
For pleasure out of bounds: if needs must be,
Get pleasure and get flogged a second time!
A sullen subject would have nursed the scars
And made excuse, for throwing grammar by,
That bench was grown uneasy to the seat.
No: this poor fellow cheerfully got hands

Fit for his stumps, and what hands failed to do,
The other members did in their degree—
Unwonted service. With his mouth alone
He wrote, nay, painted pictures—think of that!
He played on a piano pedal-keyed,
Kicked out—if it was Bach's—good music thence
He rode, that 's readily conceivable,
But then he shot and never missed his bird,
With other feats as dexterous: I infer
He was not ignorant what hands are worth,
When he resolved on ruining his own.

So the two years passed somehow—who shall say
Foolishly,—as one estimates mankind,
The work they do, the play they leave undone?—
Two whole years spent in that experiment
I told you of, at Clairvaux all the time,
From April on to April: why that month
More than another, notable in life?
Does the awakening of the year arouse
Man to new projects, nerve him for fresh feats
Of what proves, for the most part of mankind
Playing or working, novel folly too?
At any rate, I see no slightest sign
Of folly (let me tell you in advance)
Nothing but wisdom meets me manifest

In the procedure of the Twentieth Day
Of April, 'Seventy,—folly's year in France.

It was delightful Spring, and out of doors
Temptation to adventure. Walk or ride?
There was a wild young horse to exercise,
And teach the way to go and pace to keep:
Monsieur Léonce Miranda chose to ride.
So, while they clapped soft saddle straight on back,
And bitted jaw to satisfaction,—since
The partner of his days must stay at home,
Teased by some trifling legacy of March
To throat or shoulder,—visit duly paid
And "farewell" given and received again,—
As chamber-door considerately closed
Behind him, still five minutes were to spend.
How better, than by clearing, two and two,
The staircase-steps and coming out aloft
Upon the platform yonder (raise your eyes!)
And tasting, just as those two years before,
Spring's bright advance upon the tower a-top,
The feature of the front, the Belvedere?

Look at it for a moment while I breathe.

IV.

Ready to hear the rest? How good you are!

Now for this Twentieth splendid day of Spring,
All in a tale,—sun, wind, sky, earth and sea,—
To bid man "Up, be doing!" Mount the stair,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda mounts so brisk,
And look—ere his elastic foot arrive—
Your longest, far and wide, o'er fronting space.
Yon white streak—Havre lighthouse! Name and name,
How the mind runs from each to each relay,
Town after town, till Paris' self be touched,
Superlatively big with life and death
To all the world, that very day perhaps!
He who stepped out upon the platform here,
Pinnacled over the expanse, gave thought
Neither to Rouher nor Ollivier, Roon
Nor Bismarck, Emperor nor King, but just
To steeple, church, and shrine, The Ravissante!

He saw Her, whom myself saw, but when Spring

Was passing into Fall: not robed and crowned
As, thanks to him, and her you know about,
She stands at present; but She smiled the same.
Thither he turned—to never turn away.

He thought . . .

(Suppose I should prefer "He said?"
Along with every act—and speech is act—
There go, a multitude impalpable
To ordinary human faculty,
The thoughts which give the act significance.
Who is a poet needs must apprehend
Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to speak.
Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry:
Speech is reported in the newspaper.)

He said, then, probably no word at all,
But thought as follows—in a minute's space—
One particle of ore beats out such leaf!

"This Spring-morn I am forty-three years old:
In prime of life, perfection of estate
Bodily, mental, nay, material too,—
My whole of worldly fortunes reach their height.
Body and soul alike on eminence:

It is not probable I ever raise
Soul above standard by increase of worth,
Nor reasonably may expect to lift
Body beyond the present altitude.

"Behold me, Lady called The Ravissante!
Such as I am, I—gave myself to you
So long since, that I cannot say 'I give.
All my belongings, what is summed in life,
I have submitted wholly—as man might,
At least, as *I* might, who am weak, not strong,—
Wholly, then, to your rule and governance,
So far as I had strength. My weakness was—
I felt a fascination, at each point
And pore of me, a Power as absolute
Claiming that soul should recognize her sway.
O you were no whit clearlier Queen, I see,
Throughout the life that rolls out ribbon-like
Its shot-silk length behind me, than the strange
Mystery—how shall I denominate
The unrobed One? Robed you go and crowned as well,
Named by the nations: she is hard to name,
Though you have spelt out certain characters
Obscure upon what fillet binds her brow,
Lust of the flesh, lust of the eye, life's pride.

'So call her, and contemn the enchantress!'—'Crush
The despot, and recover liberty!'—
Cried despot and enchantress at each ear.
You were conspicuous and pre-eminent,
Authoritative and imperial,—you
Spoke first, claimed homage: did I hesitate?
Born for no mastery, but servitude,
Men cannot serve two masters, says the Book;
Master should measure strength with master, then,
Before on servant is imposed a task.
You spoke first, promised best, and threatened most;
The other never threatened, promised, spoke
A single word, but, when your part was done,
Lifted a finger, and I, prostrate, knew
Films were about me, though you stood aloof
Smiling or frowning 'Where is power like mine
To punish or reward thee? Rise, thou fool!
Will to be free, and, lo, I lift thee loose!'
Did I not will, and could I rise a whit?
Lay I, at any time, content to lie?
'To lie, at all events, brings pleasure: make
Amends by undemanded pain!' I said.
Did not you prompt me? 'Purchase now by pain
Pleasure hereafter in the world to come!'
I could not pluck my heart out, as you bade
Unbidden, I burned off my hands at least.

My soul retained its treasure; but my purse
Lightened itself with much alacrity.
Well, where is the reward? what promised fruit
Of sacrifice in peace, content? what sense
Of added strength to bear or to forbear?
What influx of new light assists me now
Even to guess you recognize a gain
In what was loss enough to mortal me?
But she, the less authoritative voice,
Oh, how distinct enunciating, how
Plain dealing! Gain she gave was gain indeed!
That, you deny: that, you contemptuous call
Acorns, swine's food not man's meat! 'Spurn the draff!'
Ay, but those life-tree apples I prefer,
Am I to die of hunger till they drop?
Husks keep flesh from starvation, anyhow.
Give those life-apples!—one, worth woods of oak,
Worth acorns by the waggon-load,—one shoot
Through heart and brain, assurance bright and brief
That you, my Lady, my own Ravissante,
Feel, through my famine, served and satisfied,
Own me, your starveling, soldier of a sort!
Your soldier! do I read my title clear
Even to call myself your friend, not foe?
What is the pact between us but a truce?
At best I shall have staved off enmity,

Obtained a respite, ransomed me from wrath.
I pay, instalment by instalment, life,
Earth's tribute-money, pleasures great and small,
Whereof should at the last one penny piece
Fall short, the whole heap becomes forfeiture.
You find in me deficient soldiership:
Want the whole life or none. I grudge that whole,
Because I am not sure of recompense:
Because I want faith. Whose the fault? I ask.
If insufficient faith have done thus much,
Contributed thus much of sacrifice,
More would move mountains, you are warrant. Well,
Grant, you, the grace, I give the gratitude!
And what were easier? 'Ask and have' folk call
Miranda's method: 'Have, nor need to ask!'
So do they formulate your quality
Superlative beyond my human grace.
The Ravissante, you ravish men away
From puny aches and petty pains, assuaged
By man's own art with small expenditure
Of pill or potion, unless, put to shame,
Nature is roused and sets things right herself.
Your miracles are grown our commonplace;
No day but pilgrim hobbles his last mile,
Kneels down and rises up, flings crutch away,
Or else appends it to the reverend heap

Beneath you, votive cripple-carpentry.
Some few meet failure—oh, they wanted faith,
And may betake themselves to La Salette,
Or seek Lourdes, so that hence the scandal limp!
The many get their grace and go their way
Rejoicing, with a tale to tell,—most like,
A staff to borrow, since the crutch is gone,
Should the first telling happen at my house,
And teller wet his whistle with my wine.
I tell this to a doctor and he laughs:
'Give me permission to cry—Out of bed,
You loth rheumatic sluggard! Cheat yon chair
Of laziness, its gouty occupant!—
You should see miracles performed. But now,
I give advice, and take as fee ten francs,
And do as much as does your Ravissante.
Send her that case of cancer to be cured
I have refused to treat for any fee,
Bring back my would-be patient sound and whole,
And see me laugh on t' other side my mouth!'
Can he be right, and are you hampered thus?
Such pettiness restricts a miracle
Wrought by the Great Physician, who hears prayer,
Visibly seated in your mother-lap!
He, out of nothing, made sky, earth, and sea,
And all that in them is—man, beast, bird, fish,

Down to this insect on my parapet.
Look how the marvel of a minim crawls!
Were I to kneel among the halt and maimed,
And pray 'Who mad'st the insect with ten legs,
Make me one finger grow where ten were once!'
The very priests would thrust me out of church.
'What folly does the madman dare expect?
No faith obtains—in this late age, at least—
Such cure as that! We ease rheumatics, though!'

"Ay, bring the early ages back again,
What prodigy were unattainable?
I read your annals. Here came Louis Onze,
Gave thrice the sum he ever gave before
At one time, some three hundred crowns, to wit—
On pilgrimage to pray for—health, he found?
Did he? I do not read it in Commines.
Here sent poor joyous Marie-Antoinette
To thank you that a Dauphin dignified
Her motherhood—called Duke of Normandy
And Martyr of the Temple, much the same
As if no robe of hers had dressed you rich;
No silver lamps, she gave, illume your shrine!
Here, following example, fifty years
Ago, in gratitude for birth again
Of yet another destined King of France,

Did not the Duchess fashion with her hands,
And frame in gold and crystal, and present
A bouquet made of artificial flowers?
And was he King of France, and is not he
Still Count of Chambord?

"Such the days of faith,
And such their produce to encourage mine!
What now, if I too count without my host?
I too have given money, ornament,
And 'artificial flowers'—which, when I plucked,
Seemed rooting at my heart and real enough:
What if I gain thereby nor health of mind,
Nor youth renewed which perished in its prime,
Burnt to a cinder 'twixt the red-hot bars,
Nor gain to see my second baby-hope
Of managing to live on terms with both
Opposing potentates, the Power and you,
Crowned with success? I dawdle out my days
In exile here at Clairvaux, with mock love,
That gives—while whispering 'Would I dared refuse!'—
What the loud voice declares my heart's free gift:
Mock worship, mock superiority
O'er those I style the world's benighted ones,
That irreligious sort I pity so,
Dumas and even Hertford who is Duke.

"Impiety? Not if I know myself!
Not if you know the heart and soul I bare,
I bid you cut, hack, slash, anatomize,
Till peccant part be found and flung away!
Demonstrate where I need more faith! Describe
What act shall evidence sufficiency
Of faith, or warrant for such exercise
Of power, in my behalf, as all the world
Except poor praying me declares profuse?
Poor me? It is at world, not me alone,
That world which prates of fixed laws and the like,
I fain would save, poor world so ignorant!
And your part were—what easy miracle?
Oh, Lady, could I make your want like mine!"

Then his face grew one luminosity.

"Simple, sufficient! Happiness at height!
I solve the riddle, I persuade mankind.
I have been just the simpleton who stands—
Summoned to claim his patrimonial rights—
At shilly-shally, may he knock or no
At his own door in his own house and home
Whereof he holds the very title-deeds!
Here is my title to this property,

This power you hold for profit of myself
And all the world at need—which need is now!

"My title—let me hear who controverts!
Count Mailleville built yon church. Why did he so?
Because he found your image. How came that?
His shepherd told him that a certain sheep
Was wont to scratch with hoof and scrape with horn
At ground where once the Danes had razed a church.
Thither he went, and there he dug, and thence
He disinterred the image he conveyed
In pomp to Londres yonder, his domain.
You liked the old place better than the new.
The Count might surely have divined as much:
He did not; someone might have spoke a word:
No one did. A mere dream had warned enough
That back again in pomp you best were borne:
No dream warned, and no need of convoy was;
An angel caught you up and clapped you down—
No mighty task, you stand one *mètre* high,
And people carry you about at times.
Why, then, did you despise the simple course?
Because you are the Queen of Angels: when
You front us in a picture, there flock they,
Angels around you, here and everywhere.

"Therefore, to prove indubitable faith,
Those angels that acknowledge you their queen,
I summon them to bear me to your feet
From Clairvaux through the air, an easy trip!
Faith without flaw! I trust your potency,
Benevolence, your will to save the world—
By such a simplest of procedures, too!
Not even by affording angel-help,
Unless it please you: there 's a simpler mode:
Only suspend the law of gravity,
And, while at back, permitted to propel,
The air helps onward, let the air in front
Cease to oppose my passage through the midst!

"Thus I bestride the railing, leg o'er leg,
Thus, lo, I stand, a single inch away,
At dizzy edge of death,—no touch of fear,
As safe on tower above as turf below!
Your smile enswathes me in beatitude,
You lift along the votary—who vaults,
Who, in the twinkling of an eye, revives,
Dropt safely in the space before the church—
How crowded, since this morn is market-day!
I shall not need to speak. The news will run
Like wild-fire. 'Thousands saw Miranda's flight!
'T is telegraphed to Paris in a trice.

The Boulevard is one buzz 'Do you believe?
Well, this time, thousands saw Miranda's flight:
You know him, goldsmith in the Place Vendôme.'
In goes the Empress to the Emperor:
'Now—will you hesitate to make disgorge
Your wicked King of Italy his gains,
Give the Legations to the Pope once more?'
Which done,—why, grace goes back to operate,
They themselves set a good example first,
Resign the empire twenty years usurped,
And Henry, the Desired One, reigns o'er France!
Regenerated France makes all things new!
My house no longer stands on Quai Rousseau
But Quai rechristened Alacoque: a quai
Where Renan burns his book, and Veuillot burns
Renan beside, since Veuillot rules the roast,
Re-edits now indeed 'The Universe.'
O blessing, O superlatively big
With blessedness beyond all blessing dreamed
By man! for just that promise has effect,
'Old things shall pass away and all be new!'
Then, for a culminating mercy-feat,
Wherefore should I dare dream impossible
That I too have my portion in the change?
My past with all its sorrow, sin and shame,
Becomes a blank, a nothing! There she stands,

Clara de Millefleurs, all deodorized,
Twenty years' stain wiped off her innocence!
There never was Muhlhausen, nor at all
Duke Hertford: nought that was, remains, except
The beauty,—yes, the beauty is unchanged!
Well, and the soul too, that must keep the same!
And so the trembling little virgin hand
Melts into mine, that 's back again, of course!
—Think not I care about my poor old self!
I only want my hand for that one use,
To take her hand, and say 'I marry you—
Men, women, angels, you behold my wife!
There is no secret, nothing wicked here,
Nothing she does not wish the world to know!'
None of your married women have the right
To mutter 'Yes, indeed, she beats us all
In beauty,—but our lives are pure at least!'
Bear witness, for our marriage is no thing
Done in a corner! 'T is The Ravissante
Repairs the wrong of Paris. See, She smiles,
She beckons, She bids 'Hither, both of you!'
And may we kneel? And will you bless us both?
And may I worship you, and yet love her?
Then!"—

A sublime spring from the balustrade
About the tower so often talked about,

A flash in middle air, and stone-dead lay
Monsieur Léonce Miranda on the turf.

A gardener who watched, at work the while
Dibbling a flower-bed for geranium-shoots,
Saw the catastrophe, and, straightening back,
Stood up and shook his brows. "Poor soul, poor soul!
Just what I prophesied the end would be!
Ugh—the Red Night-cap!" (as he raised the head)
"This must be what he meant by those strange words
While I was weeding larkspurs yesterday,
'Angels would take him!' Mad!"

No! sane, I say.
Such being the conditions of his life,
Such end of life was not irrational.
Hold a belief, you only half-believe,
With all-momentous issues either way,—
And I advise you imitate this leap,
Put faith to proof, be cured or killed at once!
Call you men, killed through cutting cancer out,
The worse for such an act of bravery?
That 's more than *I* know. In my estimate,
Better lie prostrate on his turf at peace,
Than, wistful, eye, from out the tent, the tower,

Racked with a doubt "Will going on bare knees
All the way to The Ravissante and back,
Saying my Ave Mary all the time,
Somewhat excuse if I postpone my march?
—Make due amends for that one kiss I gave
In gratitude to her who held me out
Superior Fricquot's sermon, hot from press,
A-spread with hands so sinful yet so smooth?"

And now, sincerely do I pray she stand,
Clara, with interposing sweep of robe,
Between us and this horror! Any screen
Turns white by contrast with the tragic pall;
And her dubiety distracts at least,
As well as snow, from such decided black.
With womanhood, at least, we have to do:
Ending with Clara—is the word too kind?

Let pass the shock! There's poignancy enough
When what one parted with, a minute since,
Alive and happy, is returned a wreck—
All that was, all that seemed about to be,
Razed out and ruined now for evermore,
Because a straw descended on this scale
Rather than that, made death o'erbalance life.
But think of cage-mates in captivity,

Inured to day-long, night-long vigilance
Each of the other's tread and angry turn
If behind prison-bars the jailer knocked:
These whom society shut out, and thus
Penned in, to settle down and regulate
By the strange law, the solitary life—
When death divorces such a fellowship,
Theirs may pair off with that prodigious woe
Imagined of a ghastly brotherhood—
One watcher left in lighthouse out at sea
With leagues of surf between the land and him
Alive with his dead partner on the rock;
One galley-slave, whom curse and blow compel
To labour on, ply oar—beside his chain,
Encumbered with a corpse-companion now.
Such these: although, no prisoners, self-entrenched
They kept the world off from their barricade.

Memory, gratitude was poignant, sure,
Though pride brought consolation of a kind.
Twenty years long had Clara been—of whom
The rival, nay, the victor, past dispute?
What if in turn The Ravissante at length
Proved victor—which was doubtful—anyhow,
Here lay the inconstant with, conspicuous too,
The fruit of his good fortune!

"Has he gained
By leaving me?" she might soliloquize:
"All love could do, I did for him. I learned
By heart his nature, what he loved and loathed,
Leaned to with liking, turned from with distaste.
No matter what his least velleity,
I was determined he should want no wish,
And in conformity administered
To his requirement; most of joy I mixed
With least of sorrow in life's daily draught,
Twenty years long, life's proper average.
And when he got to quarrel with my cup,
Would needs outsweeten honey, and discard
That gall-drop we require lest nectar cloy,—
I did not call him fool, and vex my friend,
But quietly allowed experiment,
Encouraged him to spice his drink, and now
Grate *lignum vitæ*, now bruise so-called grains
Of Paradise, and pour now, for perfume,
Distilment rare, the rose of Jericho,
Holy-thorn, passion-flower, and what know I?
Till beverage obtained the fancied smack.
'Twas wild-flower-wine that neither helped nor harmed
Who sipped and held it for restorative—
What harm? But here has he been through the hedge
Straying in search of simples, while my back

Was turned a minute, and he finds a prize,
Monkshood and belladonna! O my child,
My truant little boy, despite the beard,
The body two feet broad and six feet long,
And what the calendar counts middle age—
You wanted, did you, to enjoy a flight?
Why not have taken into confidence
Me, that was mother to you?—never mind
What mock disguise of mistress held you mine!
Had you come laughing, crying, with request,
'Make me fly, mother!' I had run upstairs
And held you tight the while I danced you high
In air from tower-top, singing 'Off we go
(On pilgrimage to Lourdes some day next month)
And swift we soar (to Rome with Peter-pence)
And low we light (at Paris where we pick
Another jewel from our store of stones
And send it for a present to the Pope)!'
So, dropt indeed you were, but on my knees,
Rolling and crowing, not a whit the worse
For journey to your Ravissante and back.
Now, no more Clairvaux—which I made you build,
And think an inspiration of your own—
No more fine house, trim garden, pretty park,
Nothing I used to busy you about,
And make believe you worked for my surprise!

What weariness to me will work become
Now that I need not seem surprised again!
This boudoir, for example, with the doves
(My stupid maid has damaged, dusting one)
Embossed in stucco o'er the looking-glass
Beside the toilet-table! dear—dear me!"

Here she looked up from her absorbing grief,
And round her, crow-like grouped, the Cousinry,
(She grew aware) sat witnesses at watch.
For, two days had elapsed since fate befell
The courser in the meadow, stretched so stark.
They did not cluster on the tree-tops, close
Their sooty ranks, caw and confabulate
For nothing: but, like calm determined crows,
They came to take possession of their corpse.
And who shall blame them? Had not they the right?

One spoke. "They would be gentle, not austere.
They understood and were compassionate.
Madame Muhlhausen lay too abject now
For aught but the sincerest pity; still,
Since plain speech salves the wound it seems to make,
They must speak plainly—circumstances spoke!
Sin had conceived and brought forth death indeed.
As the commencement so the close of things:

Just what might be expected all along!
Monsieur Léonce Miranda launched his youth
Into a cesspool of debauchery,
And if he thence emerged all dripping slime,
Where was the change except from thin to thick,
One warm rich mud-bath, Madame?—you, in place
Of Paris-drainage and distilment, you
He never needed budge from, boiled to rags!
True, some good instinct left the natural man,
Some touch of that deep dye wherewith imbued
By education, in his happier day,
The hopeful offspring of high parentage
Was fleece-marked moral and religious sheep,—
Some ruddle, faint remainder, (we admit)
Stuck to Miranda, rubbed he ne'er so rude
Against the goatly coarseness: to the last,
Moral he styled himself, religious too!
Which means—what ineradicable good
You found, you never left till good's self proved
Perversion and distortion, nursed to growth
So monstrous, that the tree-stock, dead and dry,
Were seemlier far than such a heap grotesque
Of fungous flourishing excrescence. Here
Sap-like affection, meant for family,
Stole off to feed one sucker fat—yourself;
While branchage, trained religiously aloft

To rear its head in reverence to the sun,
Was pulled down earthward, pegged and picketed,
By topiary contrivance, till the tree
Became an arbour where, at vulgar ease,
Sat superstition grinning through the loops.
Still, nature is too strong or else too weak
For cockney treatment: either, tree springs back
To pristine shape, or else degraded droops,
And turns to touchwood at the heart. So here—
Body and mind, at last the man gave way.
His body—there it lies, what part was left
Unmutilated! for, the strife commenced
Two years ago, when both hands burnt to ash,
—A branch broke loose, by loss of what choice twigs!
As for his mind—behold our register
Of all its moods, from the incipient mad,
Nay, mere erratic, to the stark insane,
Absolute idiocy or what is worse!
All have we catalogued—extravagance
In worldly matters, luxury absurd,
And zeal as crazed in its expenditure
Of nonsense called devotion. Don't we know
—We Cousins, bound in duty to our kin,—
What mummeries were practised by you two
At Clairvaux? Not a servant got discharge
But came and told his grievance, testified

To acts which turn religion to a farce.
And as the private mock, so patent—see—
The public scandal! Ask the neighbourhood—
Or rather, since we asked them long ago,
Read what they answer, depositions down,
Signed, sealed and sworn to! Brief, the man was mad.
We are his heirs and claim our heritage.
Madame Muhlhausen,—whom good taste forbids
We qualify as do these documents,—
Fear not lest justice stifle mercy's prayer!
True, had you lent a willing ear at first,
Had you obeyed our call two years ago,
Restrained a certain insolence of eye,
A volubility of tongue, that time,
Your prospects had been none the worse, perhaps.
Still, fear not but a decent competence
Shall smooth the way for your declining age!
What we propose, then . . ."

Clara dried her eyes,
Sat up, surveyed the consistory, spoke
After due pause, with something of a smile.

" Gentlemen, kinsfolk of my friend defunct,
In thus addressing me—of all the world!—
You much misapprehend what part I play.

I claim no property you speak about.
You might as well address the park-keeper,
Harangue him on some plan advisable
For covering the park with cottage-plots.
He is the servant, no proprietor,
His business is to see the sward kept trim,
Untrespassed over by the indiscreet:
Beyond that, he refers you to myself—
Another servant of another kind—
Who again—quite as limited in act—
Refer you, with your projects,—can I else?
To who in mastery is ultimate,
The Church. The Church is sole administrant,
Since sole possessor of what worldly wealth
Monsieur Léonce Miranda late possessed.
Often enough has he attempted, nay,
Forced me, well-nigh, to occupy the post
You seemingly suppose I fill,—receive
As gift the wealth entrusted me as grace.
This—for quite other reasons than appear
So cogent to your perspicacity—
This I refused; and, firm as you could wish,
Still was my answer 'We two understand
Each one the other. I am intimate
—As how can be mere fools and knaves—or, say,
Even your Cousins?—with your love to me,

Devotion to the Church. Would Pr
Appoint, and make me certain of the
That I survive you (which is little lik
Seeing you hardly overpass my age
And more than match me in abund
In such case, certainly I would acce
Your bounty: better I than alien h
Should execute your planned bene
To man, your proposed largess to
But though I be survivor,—weakly
With onl an's wit to make ar
When I sha , or while I am a
Cannot you fi e me an easy ma
For hypocritical rapacity,
Kith, kin and generation, couchi
Ever on the alert to pounce on p
Far be it I should say they profi
By that first frenzy-fit themselve
Cold-blooded scenical buffoons
With horror a nd damnation o'e
That were too shocking—I
Nor did they sei the
To rifle pock et,
Their Cousinl y
Thereby each
Had nobody

pain, poor friend! had prostrated
ıough your soul was right once more,
ned your weakness to account!
e, who agonizing watched,
hand, now bribe me to forsake
onee, now bully, cap on head,
ɔretension to assuage
demanded Cousins' care?—
hated, fled me, far
you laughed at me!—they judged.
will the unkind ones [illegible] .ıate
ıs with my helple [illegible] .s,—
d misuse your de .ıict,
tage that bereavement lends
yet you lived, played tricks like

die, and they [illegible] 'ct,
' did, insanity
ih-worship, y egard
precept whic lows the poor
[illegible] raze from to last!
[illegible] enes int your life,

,e
vedere

You lost your balance and fell headlong—fine
Occasion, such, for crying *Suicide!*
Non compos mentis, naturally next,
Hands over Clairvaux to a Cousin-tribe
Who nor like me nor love The Ravissante:
Therefore be ruled by both! Life-interest
In Clairvaux,—conservation, guardianship
Of earthly good for heavenly purpose,—give
Such and no other proof of confidence!
Let Clara represent the Ravissante!'
—To whom accordingly, he then and there
Bequeathed each stick and stone, by testament
In holograph, mouth managing the quill:
Go, see the same in Londres, if you doubt!"

Then smile grew laugh, as sudden up she stood
And out she spoke: intemperate the speech!
"And now, sirs, for your special courtesy,
Your candle held up to the character
Of Lucie Steiner, whom you qualify
As coming short of perfect womanhood.
Yes, kindly critics, truth for once you tell!
True is it that through childhood, poverty,
Sloth, pressure of temptation, I succumbed,
And, ere I found what honour meant, lost mine.
So was the sheep lost, which the Shepherd found

And never lost again. My friend found me;
Or better say, the Shepherd found us both—
Since he, my friend, was much in the same mire
When first we made acquaintance. Each helped each,—
A two-fold extrication from the slough;
And, saving me, he saved himself. Since then,
Unsmirched we kept our cleanliness of coat.
It is his perfect constancy, you call
My friend's main fault—he never left his love!
While as for me, I dare your worst, impute
One breach of loving bond, these twenty years,
To me whom only cobwebs bound, you count!
'He was religiously disposed in youth!'
That may be, though we did not meet at church.
Under my teaching did he, like you scamps,
Become Voltairian—fools who mock his *faith*?
'Infirm of body!' I am silent there:
Even yourselves acknowledge service done,
Whatever motive your own souls supply
As inspiration. Love made labour light."

Then laugh grew frown, and frown grew terrible.
Do recollect what sort of person shrieked—
"Such was I, saint or sinner, what you please:
And who is it casts stone at me but you?

By your own showing, sirs, you bought and sold,
Took what advantage bargain promised bag,
Abundantly did business, and with whom?
The man whom you pronounce imbecile, push
Indignantly aside if he presume
To settle his affairs like other folk!
How is it you have stepped into his shoes
And stand there, bold as brass, 'Miranda, late,
Now, Firm-Miranda'? Sane, he signed away
That little birthright, did he? Hence to trade!
I know and he knew who 't was dipped and ducked,
Truckled and played the parasite in vain,
As now one, now the other, here you cringed,
Were feasted, took our presents, you—those drops
Just for your wife's adornment! you—that spray
Exactly suiting, as most diamonds would,
Your daughter on her marriage! No word then
Of somebody the wanton! Hence, I say,
Subscribers to the *Siècle*, every snob—
For here the post brings me the *Univers*!
Home and make money in the Place Vendôme,
Sully yourselves no longer by my sight,
And, when next Schneider wants a new *parure*,
Be careful lest you stick there by mischance
That stone beyond compare entrusted you
To kindle faith with, when, Miranda's gift,

Crowning the very crown, the Ravissante
Shall claim it! As to Clairvaux—talk to Her!
She answers by the Chapter of Raimbaux!"
Vituperative, truly! All this wrath
Because the man's relations thought him mad!
Whereat, I hope you see the Cousinry
Turn each to other, blankly dolorous,
Consult a moment, more by shrug and shrug
Than mere man's language,—finally conclude
To leave the reprobate untroubled now
In her unholy triumph, till the Law
Shall right the injured ones; for gentlemen
Allow the female sex, this sort at least,
Its privilege. So, simply "Cockatrice!"—
"Jezebel!"—"Queen of the Camellias!"—cried
Cousin to cousin, as yon hinge a-creak
Shut out the party, and the gate returned
To custody of Clairvaux. "Pretty place!
What say you, when it proves our property,
To trying a concurrence with La Roche,
And laying down a rival oyster-bed?
Where the park ends, the sea begins, you know."
So took they comfort till they came to Vire.

But I would linger, fain to snatch a look
At Clara as she stands in pride of place,

Somewhat more satisfying than my glance
So furtive, so near futile, yesterday,
Because one must be courteous. Of the masks
That figure in this little history,
She only has a claim to my respect,
And one-eyed, in her French phrase, rules the blind
Miranda hardly did his best with life:
He might have opened eye, exerted brain,
Attained conception as to right and law
In certain points respecting intercourse
Of man with woman—love, one likes to say;
Which knowledge had dealt rudely with the claim
Of Clara to play representative
And from perdition rescue soul, forsooth!
Also, the sense of him should have sufficed
For building up some better theory
Of how God operates in heaven and earth,
Than would establish Him participant
In doings yonder at the Ravissante.
The heart was wise according to its lights
And limits; but the head refused more sun,
And shrank into its mew and craved less space.
Clara, I hold the happier specimen,—
It may be, through that artist-preference
For work complete, inferiorly proposed,
To incompletion, though it aim aright.

Morally, no! Aspire, break bounds! I say,
Endeavour to be good, and better still,
And best! Success is nought, endeavour 's all.
But intellect adjusts the means to ends,
Tries the low thing, and leaves it done, at least;
No prejudice to high thing, intellect
Would do and will do, only give the means.
Miranda, in my picture-gallery,
Presents a Blake; be Clara—Meissonier!
Merely considered so by artist, mind!
For, break through Art and rise to poetry,
Being Art to tremble nearer, touch enough
The verge of vastness to inform our soul
What orb makes transit through the dark above,
And there 's the triumph!—there the incomplete,
More than completion, matches the immense,—
Then, Michelagnolo against the world!
With this proviso, let me study her
Approvingly, the finished little piece!
Born, bred, with just one instinct,—that of growth,—
Her quality was, caterpillar-like,
To all-unerringly select a leaf
And without intermission feed her fill,
Become the Painted-peacock, or belike
The Brimstone-wing, when time of year should suit;
And 't is a sign (say entomologists)

Of sickness, when the creature stops its meal
One minute, either to look up at heaven,
Or turn aside for change of aliment.
No doubt there was a certain ugliness
In the beginning, as the grub grew worm:
She could not find the proper plant at once,
But crawled and fumbled through a whole parterre.
Husband Muhlhausen served for stuff not long:
Then came confusion of the slimy track
From London, "where she gave the tone awhile,"
To Paris: let the stalks start up again,
Now she is off them, all the greener they!
But, settled on Miranda, how she sucked,
Assimilated juices, took the tint,
Mimicked the form and texture of her food!
Was he for pastime? Who so frolic-fond
As Clara? Had he a devotion-fit?
Clara grew serious with like qualm, be sure!
In health and strength he,—healthy too and strong,
She danced, rode, drove, took pistol-practice, fished,
Nay, "managed sea-skiff with consummate skill."
In pain and weakness, he,—she patient watched
And wiled the slow drip-dropping hours away.
She bound again the broken self-respect,
She picked out the true meaning from mistake,
Praised effort in each stumble, laughed "Well-climbed!"

When others groaned "None ever grovelled so!"
"Rise, you have gained experience!" was her word:
"Lie satisfied, the ground is just your place!"
They thought appropriate counsel. "Live, not die,
And take my full life to eke out your own:
That shall repay me and with interest!
Write!—is your mouth not clever as my hand?
Paint!—the last Exposition warrants me,
Plenty of people must ply brush with toes.
And as for music—look, what folk nickname
A lyre, those ancients played to ravishment,—
Over the *pendule*, see, Apollo grasps
A three-stringed gimcrack which no Liszt could coax
Such music from as jew's-harp makes to-day!
Do your endeavour like a man, and leave
The rest to 'fortune who assists the bold'—
Learn, you, the Latin which you taught me first,
You clever creature—clever, yes, I say!"

If he smiled "Let us love, love's wrong comes right,
Shows reason last of all! Necessity
Must meanwhile serve for plea—so, mind not much
Old Fricquot's menace!"—back she smiled "Who minds?"
If he sighed "Ah, but She is strict, they say,
For all Her mercy at the Ravissante,

She scarce will be put off so!"—straight a sigh
Returned "My lace must go to trim Her gown!"
I nowise doubt she inwardly believed
Smiling and sighing had the same effect
Upon the venerated image. What
She did believe in, I as little doubt,
Was—Clara's self's own birthright to sustain
Existence, grow from grub to butterfly,
Upon unlimited Miranda-leaf;
In which prime article of faith confirmed,
According to capacity, she fed
On and on till the leaf was eaten up
That April morning. Even then, I praise
Her forethought which prevented leafless stalk
Bestowing any hoarded succulence
On earwig and blackbeetle squat beneath
Clairvaux, that stalk whereto her hermitage
She tacked by golden throw of silk, so fine,
So anything but feeble, that her sleep
Inside it, through last winter, two years long,
Recked little of the storm and strife without.
"But—loved him?" Friend, I do not praise her love!
True love works never for the loved one so,
Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.
Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace
Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.

"Worship not me but God!" the angels urge:
That is love's grandeur: still, in pettier love
The nice eye can distinguish grade and grade.
Shall mine degrade the velvet green and puce
Of caterpillar, palmer-worm—or what—
Ball in and out of ball, each ball with brush
Of Venus' eye-fringe round the turquoise egg
That nestles soft,—compare such paragon
With any scarabæus of the brood
Which, born to fly, keeps wing in wing-case, walks
Persistently a-trundling dung on earth?
Egypt may venerate such hierophants,
Not I—the couple yonder, Father Priest
And Mother Nun, who came and went and came,
Beset this Clairvaux, trundled money-muck
To midden and the main heap oft enough,
But never bade unshut from sheath the gauze,
Nor showed that, who would fly, must let fall filth,
And warn "Your jewel, brother, is a blotch:
Sister, your lace trails ordure! Leave your sins,
And so best gift with Crown and grace with Robe!"

The superstition is extinct, you hope?
It were, with my good will! Suppose it so,
Bethink you likewise of the latest use
Whereto a Night-cap is convertible,

And draw your very thickest, thread and thrum,
O'er such a decomposing face of things,
Once so alive, it seemed immortal too!

This happened two years since. The Cousinry
Returned to Paris, called in help from Law,
And in due form proceeded to dispute
Monsieur Léonce Miranda's competence,
Being insane, to make a valid Will.

Much testimony volunteered itself;
The issue hardly could be doubtful—but
For that sad 'Seventy which must intervene,
Provide poor France with other work to mind
Than settling lawsuits, even for the sake
Of such a party as the Ravissante.
It only was this Summer that the case
Could come and be disposed of, two weeks since,
At Vire—Tribunal Civil—Chamber First.

Here, issued with all regularity,
I hold the judgment—just, inevitable,
Nowise to be contested by what few
Can judge the judges; sum and substance, thus—

"Inasmuch as we find, the Cousinry,

During that very period when they take
Monsieur Léonce Miranda for stark mad,
Considered him to be quite sane enough
For doing much important business with—
Nor showed suspicion of his competence
Until, by turning of the tables, loss
Instead of gain accrued to them thereby,—
Plea of incompetence we set aside.

—"The rather, that the dispositions, sought
To be impugned, are natural and right,
Nor jar with any reasonable claim
Of kindred, friendship or acquaintance here.
Nobody is despoiled, none overlooked;
Since the testator leaves his property
To just that person whom, of all the world,
He counted he was most indebted to.
In mere discharge, then, of conspicuous debt,
Madame Muhlhausen has priority,
Enjoys the usufruct of Clairvaux.

"Next,
Such debt discharged, such life determining,
Such earthly interest provided for,
Monsieur Léonce Miranda may bequeath,
In absence of more fit recipient, fund

And usufruct together to the Church
Whereof he was a special devotee.

"—Which disposition, being consonant
With a long series of such acts and deeds
Notorious in his life-time, needs must stand,
Unprejudiced by eccentricity
Nowise amounting to distemper: since,
In every instance signalized as such,
We recognize no overleaping bounds,
No straying out of the permissible:
Duty to the Religion of the Land,—
Neither excessive nor inordinate.

"The minor accusations are dismissed;
They prove mere freak and fancy, boyish mood
In age mature of simple kindly man.
Exuberant in generosities
To all the world: no fact confirms the fear
He meditated mischief to himself
That morning when he met the accident
Which ended fatally. The case is closed."

How otherwise? So, when I grazed the skirts,
And had the glimpse of who made, yesterday,—
Woman and retinue of goats and sheep,—

The sombre path one whiteness, vision-like,
As out of gate, and in at gate again,
They wavered,—she was lady there for life:
And, after life—I hope, a white success
Of some sort, wheresoever life resume
School interrupted by vacation—death;
Seeing that home she goes with prize in hand,
Confirmed the Châtelaine of Clairvaux.

True,
Such prize fades soon to insignificance.
Though she have eaten her Miranda up,
And spun a cradle-cone through which she pricks
Her passage, and proves Peacock-butterfly
This Autumn—wait a little week of cold!
Peacock and death's-head-moth end much the same.
And could she still continue spinning,—sure,
Cradle would soon crave shroud for substitute,
And o'er this life of hers distaste would drop
Red-cotton-Night-cap-wise.

How say you, friend? .
Have I redeemed my promise? Smile assent
Through the dark Winter-gloom between us both!
Already, months ago and miles away,

I just as good as told you, in a flash,
The while we paced the sands before my house,
All this poor story—truth and nothing else.
Accept that moment's flashing, amplified,
Impalpability reduced to speech,
Conception proved by birth,—no other change!
Can what Saint-Rambert flashed me in a thought,
Good gloomy London make a poem of?
Such ought to be whatever dares precede,
Play ruddy herald-star to your white blaze
About to bring us day. How fail imbibe
Some foretaste of effulgence? Sun shall wax,
And star shall wane: what matter, so star tell
The drowsy world to start awake, rub eyes,
And stand all ready for morn's joy a-blush?

January 23, 1873.



THE INN ALBUM.

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1875.

I.

"THAT oblong book 's the Album ; hand it here !
Exactly ! page on page of gratitude
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view !
I praise these poets : they leave margin-space ;
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around,
And primly, trimly, keep the foot's confine,
Modest and maidlike ; lubber prose o'ersprawls
And straddling stops the path from left to right.
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,
Which poem spares a corner? What comes first?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy !)
Or see—succincter beauty, brief and bold—
'*If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port win*

He needs not despair Of dining well here—'
'*Here!*' I myself could find a better rhyme!
That bard 's a Browning; he neglects the form:
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense!
Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide!
I 'll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt.
A minute's fresh air, then to cipher-work!
Three little columns hold the whole account:
Ecarté, after which Blind Hookey, then
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.
'T is easy reckoning: I have lost, I think."

Two personages occupy this room
Shabby-genteel, that 's parlour to the inn
Perched on a view-commanding eminence;
—Inn which may be a veritable house
Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste
Till tourists found his coign of vantage out,
And fingered blunt the individual mark
And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.
On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag;
His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds;
They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,
Varnished and coffined, *Salmo ferox* glares

—Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed
And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.

So much describes the stuffy little room—
Vulgar flat smooth respectability:
Not so the burst of landscape surging in,
Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair
Is, plain enough, the younger personage
Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft
The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall
Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.
He leans into a living glory-bath
Of air and light where seems to float and move
The wooded watered country, hill and dale
And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist,
A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed patch
Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close
For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,
This inn is perched above to dominate—
Except such sign of human neighbourhood,
(And this surmised rather than sensible)
There's nothing to disturb absolute peace,
The reign of English nature—which means art
And civilized existence. Wildness' self
Is just the cultured triumph. Presently

Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place
That knows the right way to defend itself:
Silence hems round a burning spot of life.
Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,
And where a village broods, an inn should boast—
Close and convenient: here you have them both.
This inn, the Something-arms—the family's—
(Don't trouble Guillim: heralds leave out half!)
Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,
And epics have been planned here; but who plan
Take holy orders and find work to do.
Painters are more productive, stop a week,
Declare the prospect quite a Corot,—ay,
For tender sentiment,—themselves incline
Rather to handsweep large and liberal;
Then go, but not without success achieved
—Haply some pencil-drawing, oak or beech,
Ferns at the base and ivies up the bole,
On this a slug, on that a butterfly.
Nay, he who hooked the *salmo* pendent here,
Also exhibited, this same May-month,
'*Foxgloves: a study*'—so inspires the scene,
The air, which now the younger personage
Inflates him with till lungs o'erfraught are fain
Sigh forth a satisfaction might bestir
Even those tufts of tree-tops to the South

I' the distance where the green dies off to grey,
Which, easy of conjecture, front the Place;
He eyes them, elbows wide, each hand to cheek.

His fellow, the much older—either say
A youngish-old man or man oldish-young—
Sits at the table: wicks are noisome-deep
In wax, to detriment of plated ware;
Above—piled, strewn—is store of playing-cards,
Counters and all that 's proper for a game.
He sets down, rubs out figures in the book,
Adds and subtracts, puts back here, carries there,
Until the summed-up satisfaction stands
Apparent, and he pauses o'er the work:
Soothes what of brain was busy under brow,
By passage of the hard palm, curing so
Wrinkle and crowfoot for a second's space;
Then lays down book and laughs out. No mistake,
Such the sum-total—ask Colenso else!

Roused by which laugh, the other turns, laughs too—
The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps.

"Well, what 's the damage—three, or four, or five?
How many figures in a row? Hand here!
Come now, there 's one expense all yours not mine—

Scribbling the people's Album over, leaf
The first and foremost too! You think, perhaps,
They 'll only charge you for a brand-new book
Nor estimate the literary loss?
Wait till the small account comes! '*To one night's*
Lodging,'—for 'beds,' they can't say,—'*pound or so;*
Dinner, Apollinaris,—what they please,
Attendance not included;' last looms large
'*Defacement of our Album, late enriched*
With'—let 's see what! Here, at the window, though!
Ay, breathe the morning and forgive your luck!
Fine enough country for a fool like me
To own, as next month I suppose I shall!
Eh? True fool's-fortune! so console yourself.
Let 's see, however—hand the book, I say!
Well, you 've improved the classic by romance.
Queer reading! Verse with parenthetic prose—
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
(Three-two fives) '*life how profitably spent*'
(Five-nought, five-nine fives) '*yonder humble cot,*'
(More and more noughts and fives) '*in mild content;*
And did my feelings find the natural vent
In friendship and in love, how blest my lot!'
Then follow the dread figures—five! '*Content!*'
That 's apposite! Are you content as he—
Simpkin the sonneteer? *Ten thousand pounds*

Give point to his effusion—by so much
Leave me the richer and the poorer you
After our night's play; who 's content the most,
I, you, or Simpkin?"
So the polished snob.
The elder man, refinement every inch
From brow to boot-end, quietly replies:

"Simpkin 's no name I know. I had my whim."

"Ay, had you! And such things make friendship thick
Intimates I may boast we were; henceforth,
Friends—shall it not be?—who discard reserve,
Use plain words, put each dot upon each i,
Till death us twain do part? The bargain 's struck!
Old fellow, if you fancy—(to begin—)
I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,
You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs!
Because you happen to be twice my age
And twenty times my master, must perforce
No blink of daylight struggle through the web
There 's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,
And welcome, for I like it: blind me,—no!
A very pretty piece of shuttle-work
Was that—your mere chance question at the club—
'*Do you go anywhere this Whitsuntide?*

I 'm off for Paris, there 's the Opera—there 's
The Salon, there 's a china-sale,—beside
Chantilly; and, for good companionship,
There 's Such-and-such and So-and-so. Suppose
We start together?' 'No such holiday!'
I told you: '*Paris and the rest be hanged!*
Why plague me who am pledged to home-delights?
I 'm the engaged now; through whose fault but yours?
On duty. As you well know. Don't I drowse
The week away down with the Aunt and Niece?
No help: it 's leisure, loneliness and love.
Wish I could take you; but fame travels fast,'—
A man of much newspaper-paragraph
You scare domestic circles; and beside
Would not you like your lot, that second taste
Of nature and approval of the grounds!
You might walk early or lie late, so shirk
Week-day devotions: but stay Sunday o'er,
And morning church is obligatory:
No mundane garb permissible, or dread
The butler's privileged monition! No!
Pack off to Paris, nor wipe tear away!'
Whereon how artlessly the happy flash
Followed, by inspiration! ''*Tell you what—*
Let 's turn their flank, try things on t' other side!
Inns for my money! Liberty 's the life!

We'll lie in hiding: there's the crow-nest nook,
The tourist's joy, the Inn they rave about,
Inn that's out—out of sight and out of mind
And out of mischief to all four of us—
Aunt and niece, you and me. At night arrive;
At morn, find time for just a Pisgah-view
Of my friend's Land of Promise; then depart.
And while I'm whizzing onward by first train,
Bound for our own place (since my Brother sulks
And says I shun him like the plague) yourself—
Why, you have stepped thence, start from platform, gay
Despite the sleepless journey,—love lends wings,—
Hug aunt and niece who, none the wiser, wait
The faithful advent! Eh?' *'With all my heart,'*
Said I to you; said I to mine own self:
'Does he believe I fail to comprehend
He wants just one more final friendly snack
At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,
Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport?'
And did I spoil sport, pull face grim,—nay, grave?
Your pupil does you better credit! No!
I parleyed with my pass-book,—rubbed my pair
At the big balance in my banker's hands,—
Folded a cheque cigar-case-shape,—just wants
Filling and signing,—and took train, resolved
To execute myself with decency

And let you win—if not Ten thousand quite,
Something by way of wind-up-farewell burst
Of firework-nosegay! Where 's your fortune fled?
Or is not fortune constant after all?
You lose ten thousand pounds: had I lost half
Or half that, I should bite my lips, I think.
You man of marble! Strut and stretch my best
On tiptoe, I shall never reach your height.
How does the loss feel! Just one lesson more!"

The more refined man smiles a frown away.

"The lesson shall be—only boys like you
Put such a question at the present stage.
I had a ball lodge in my shoulder once,
And, full five minutes, never guessed the fact;
Next day, I felt decidedly: and still,
At twelve years' distance, when I lift my arm
A twinge reminds me of the surgeon's probe.
Ask me, this day month, how I feel my luck!
And meantime please to stop impertinence,
For—don't I know its object? All this chaff
Covers the corn, this preface leads to speech,
This boy stands forth a hero. '*There, my lord!*
Our play was true play, fun not earnest! I
Empty your purse, inside out, while my poke

Bulges to bursting? You can badly spare
A doit, confess now, Duke though brother be!
While I 'm gold-daubed so thickly, spangles drop
And show my father's warehouse-apron: pshaw!
Enough! We 've had a palpitating night!
Good morning! Breakfast and forget our dreams!
My mouth 's shut, mind! I tell nor man nor mouse.'
There, see! He don't deny it! Thanks, my boy!
Hero and welcome—only, not on me
Make trial of your 'prentice-hand! Enough!
We 've played, I 've lost and owe ten thousand pounds,
Whereof I muster, at the moment,—well,
What 's for the bill here and the back to town.
Still, I 've my little character to keep:
You may expect your money at month's end."

The young man at the window turns round quick—
A clumsy giant handsome creature; grasps
In his large red the little lean white hand
Of the other, looks him in the sallow face.

" I say now—is it right to so mistake
A fellow, force him in mere self-defence
To spout like Mister *Mild Acclivity*
In album-language? You know well enough
Whether I like you—*like* 's no album-word

Anyhow: point me to one soul beside
In the wide world I care one straw about!
I first set eyes on you a year ago;
Since when you 've done me good—I 'll stick to it—
More than I got in the whole twenty-five
That make my life up, Oxford years and all—
Throw in the three I fooled away abroad,
Seeing myself and nobody more sage
Until I met you, and you made me man
Such as the sort is and the fates allow.
I do think, since we two kept company,
I 've learnt to know a little—all through you!
It 's nature if I like you. Taunt away!
As if I need you teaching me my place—
The snob I am, the Duke your brother is,
When just the good you did was—teaching me
My own trade, how a snob and millionaire
May lead his life and let the Duke's alone,
Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steeple-perch,
Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,
Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut
Regular peacocks who can't fly an inch
Over the courtyard-paling. Head and heart
(That 's album-style) are older than you know,
For all your knowledge: boy, perhaps—ay, boy
Had his adventure, just as he were man—

His ball-experience in the shoulder-blade,
His bit of life-long ache to recognize,
Although he bears it cheerily about,
Because you came and clapped him on the back,
Advised him '*Walk and wear the aching off!*'
Why, I was minded to sit down for life
Just in Dalmatia, build a sea-side tower
High on a rock, and so expend my days
Pursuing chemistry or botany
Or, very like, astronomy because
I noticed stars shone when I passed the place:
Letting my cash accumulate the while
In England—to lay out in lump at last
As Ruskin should direct me! All or some
Of which should I have done or tried to do,
And preciously repented, one fine day,
Had you discovered Timon, climbed his rock
And scaled his tower, some ten years thence,
suppose,
And coaxed his story from him! Don't I see
The pair conversing! It 's a novel writ
Already, I 'll be bound,—our dialogue!
'*What?*' *cried the elder and yet youthful man—*
So did the eye flash 'neath the lordly front,
And the imposing presence swell with scorn,
As the haught high-bred bearing and dispose

Contrasted with his interlocutor
The flabby low-born who, of bulk before,
Had steadily increased, one stone per week,
Since his abstention from horse-exercise:—
'What? you, as rich as Rothschild, left, you say,
London the very year you came of age,
Because your father manufactured goods—
Commission-agent hight of Manchester—
Partly, and partly through a baby case
Of disappointment I've pumped out at last—
And here you spend life's prime in gaining flesh
And giving science one more asteroid?'
Brief, my dear fellow, you instructed me,
At Alfred's and not Istria! proved a snob
May turn a million to account although
His brother be no Duke, and see good days
Without the girl he lost and someone gained.
The end is, after one year's tutelage,
Having, by your help, touched society,
Polo, Tent-pegging, Hurlingham, the Rink—
I leave all these delights, by your advice,
And marry my young pretty cousin here
Whose place, whose oaks ancestral you behold.
(Her father was in partnership with mine—
Does not his purchase look a pedigree?)
My million will be tails and tassels smart

To this plump-bodied kite, this house and land
Which, set a-soaring, pulls me, soft as sleep,
Along life's pleasant meadow,—arm left free
To lock a friend's in,—whose but yours, old boy?
Arm in arm glide we over rough and smooth,
While hand, to pocket held, saves cash from cards.
Now, if you don't esteem ten thousand pounds
(—Which I shall probably discover snug
Hid somewhere in the column-corner capped
With '*Credit*,' based on '*Balance*,'—which, I swear,
By this time next month I shall quite forget
Whether I lost or won—ten thousand pounds,
Which at this instant I would give . . . let 's see,
For Galopin—nay, for that Gainsborough
Sir Richard won't sell, and, if bought by me,
Would get my glance and praise some twice a year,–
Well, if you don't esteem that price dirt-cheap
For teaching me Dalmatia was mistake—
Why then, my last illusion-bubble breaks,
My one discovered phœnix proves a goose,
My cleverest of all companions—oh,
Was worth nor ten pence nor ten thousand pounds!
Come! Be yourself again! So endeth here
The morning's lesson! Never while life lasts
Do I touch card again. To breakfast now!
To bed—I can't say, since you needs must start

For station early—oh, the down-train still,
First plan and best plan—townward trip be hanged!
You 're due at your big brother's—pay that debt,
Then owe me not a farthing! Order eggs—
And who knows but there 's trout obtainable?"

The fine man looks well-nigh malignant: then—

"Sir, please subdue your manner! Debts are debts:
I pay mine—debts of this sort—certainly.
What do I care how you regard your gains,
Want them or want them not? The thing *I* want
Is—not to have a story circulate
From club to club—how, bent on clearing out
Young So-and-so, young So-and-so cleaned me,
Then set the empty kennel flush again,
Ignored advantage and forgave his friend—
For why? There was no wringing blood from stone!
Oh, don't be savage! You would hold your tongue,
Bite it in two, as man may; but those small
Hours in the smoking-room, when instance apt
Rises to tongue's root, tingles on to tip,
And the thinned company consists of six
Capital well-known fellows one may trust!
Next week, it 's in the 'World.' No, thank you much.
I owe ten thousand pounds: I 'll pay them!"

"Now,
This becomes funny. You 've made friends with m
I can't help knowing of the ways and means!
Or stay! they say your brother closets up
Correggio's long-lost Leda: if he means
To give you that, and if you give it me . . ."

"*I* polished snob off to aristocrat?
You compliment me! father's apron still
Sticks out from son's court-vesture; still silk purse
Roughs finger with some bristle sow-ear-born!
Well, neither I nor you mean harm at heart!
I owe you and shall pay you: which premised,
Why should what follows sound like flattery?
The fact is—you do compliment too much
Your humble master, as I own I am;
You owe me no such thanks as you protest.
The polisher needs precious stone no less
Than precious stone needs polisher: believe
I struck no tint from out you but I found
Snug lying first 'neath surface hair-breadth-deep!
Beside, I liked the exercise: with skill
Goes love to show skill for skill's sake. You see,
I 'm old and understand things: too absurd
It were you pitched and tossed away your life,
As diamond were Scotch-pebble! all the more,

That I myself misused a stone of price.
Born and bred clever—people used to say
Clever as most men, if not something more—
Yet here I stand a failure, cut awry
Or left opaque,—no brilliant named and known.
Whate'er my inner stuff, my outside 's blank;
I 'm nobody—or rather, look that same—
I 'm—who I am—and know it; but I hold
What in my hand out for the world to see?
What ministry, what mission, or what book
—I 'll say, book even? Not a sign of these!
I began—laughing—'*All these when I like!*'
I end with—well, you 've hit it!—'*This boy's cheque*
For just as many thousands as he 'll spare!'
The first—I could, and would not; your spare cash
I would, and could not: have no scruple, pray,
But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine
—When you are able!"

"Which is—when to be?
I 've heard, great characters require a fall
Of fortune to show greatness by uprise:
They touch the ground to jollily rebound,
Add to the Album! Let a fellow share
Your secret of superiority!
I know, my banker makes the money breed
Money; I eat and sleep, he simply takes

The dividends and cuts the coupons off,
Sells out, buys in, keeps doubling, tripling cash,
While I do nothing but receive and spend.
But you, spontaneous generator, hatch
A wind-egg; cluck, and forth struts Capital
As Interest to me from egg of gold.
I am grown curious: pay me by all means!
How will you make the money?"

"Mind your own—

Not my affair. Enough: or money, or
Money's worth, as the case may be, expect
Ere month's end,—keep but patient for a month!
Who 's for a stroll to station? Ten 's the time;
Your man, with my things, follow in the trap;
At stoppage of the down-train, play the arrived
On platform, and you 'll show the due fatigue
Of the night-journey,—not much sleep,—perhaps,
Your thoughts were on before you—yes, indeed,
You join them, being happily awake
With thought's sole object as she smiling sits
At breakfast-table. I shall dodge meantime
In and out station-precinct, wile away
The hour till up my engine pants and smokes.
No doubt, she goes to fetch you. Never fear!
She gets no glance at me, who shame such
saints!"

II.

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart
Amid profuse acknowledgment from host
Who well knows what may bring the younger back.
They light cigar, descend in twenty steps
The "*calm acclivity*," inhale—beyond
Tobacco's balm—the better smoke of turf
And wood fire,—cottages at cookery
I' the morning,—reach the main road straitening on
'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of night
Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before
The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine
Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently
The road's end with the sky's beginning mix
In one magnificence of glare, due East,
So high the sun rides,—May 's the merry month.

They slacken pace: the younger stops abrupt,
Discards cigar, looks his friend full in face.

"All right; the station comes in view at end;
Five minutes from the beech-clump, there you are!
I say: let 's halt, let 's borrow yonder gate
Of its two magpies, sit and have a talk!
Do let a fellow speak a moment! More
I think about and less I like the thing—
No, you must let me! Now, be good for once!
Ten thousand pounds be done for, dead and damned
We played for love, not hate: yes, hate! I hate
Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
To strychnine some poor devil of a lord
Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash
To lose—you knew that!—lose and none the less
Whistle to-morrow: it 's not every chap
Affords to take his punishment so well!
Now, don't be angry with a friend whose fault
Is that he thinks—upon my soul, I do—
Your head the best head going. Oh, one sees
Names in the newspaper—great this, great that,
Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate:—much I care!
Others have their opinion, I keep mine:
Which means—by right you ought to have the things
I want a head for. Here 's a pretty place,
My cousin's place, and presently my place,
Not yours! I 'll tell you how it strikes a man.
My cousin 's fond of music and of course

Plays the piano (it won't be for long!)
A brand-new bore she calls a '*semi-grand*,'
Rosewood and pearl, that blocks the drawing-room,
And cost no end of money. Twice a week
Down comes Herr Somebody and seats himself,
Sets to work teaching—with his teeth on edge—
I 've watched the rascal. '*Does he play first-rate?*'
I ask: '*I rather think so*,' answers she—
'*He 's What's-his-Name!*'—'*Why give you lessons then?*'—
'*I pay three guineas and the train beside.*'—
'*This instrument, has he one such at home?*'—
'*He? Has to practise on a table-top,*
When he can't hire the proper thing.'—'*I see!*
You 've the piano, he the skill, and God
The distribution of such gifts.' So here:
After your teaching, I shall sit and strum
Polkas on this piano of a Place
You 'd make resound with *Rule Britannia*!"

"Thanks!
I don't say but this pretty cousin's place,
Appendaged with your million, tempts my hand
As key-board I might touch with some effect."

"Then, why not have obtained the like? House, land,

Money, are things obtainable, you see,
By clever head-work: ask my father else!
You, who teach me, why not have learned, yourself?
Played like Herr Somebody with power to thump
And flourish and the rest, not bend demure
Pointing out blunders—'*Sharp, not natural!*
Permit me—on the black key use the thumb!'
There 's some fatality, I 'm sure! You say
'*Marry the cousin, that 's your proper move!*'
And I do use the thumb and hit the sharp:
You should have listened to your own head's hint,
As I to you! The puzzle 's past my power,
How you have managed—with such stuff, such means—
Not to be rich nor great nor happy man:
Of which three good things where 's a sign at all?
Just look at Dizzy! Come,—what tripped your heels?
Instruct a goose that boasts wings and can't fly!
I wager I have guessed it!—never found
The old solution of the riddle fail!
'*Who was the woman?*' I don't ask, but— '*Where*
I' the path of life stood she who tripped you?'"

"Goose
You truly are! I own to fifty years.
Why don't I interpose and cut out—you?
Compete with five-and-twenty? Age, my boy!"

"Old man, no nonsense!—even to a boy
That 's ripe at least for rationality
Rapped into him, as may be mine was, once!
I 've had my small adventure lesson me
Over the knuckles!—likely, I forget
The sort of figure youth cuts now and then,
Competing with old shoulders but young head
Despite the fifty grizzling years!"

"Aha?
Then that means—just the bullet in the blade
Which brought Dalmatia on the brain,—that, too,
Came of a fatal creature? Can't pretend
Now for the first time to surmise as much!
Make a clean breast! Recount! a secret 's safe
'Twixt you, me and the gate-post!"

"—Can't pretend,
Neither, to never have surmised your wish!
It 's no use,—case of unextracted ball—
Winces at finger-touching. Let things be!"

"Ah, if you love your love still! I hate mine."

"I can't hate."

"I won't teach you; and won't tell
You, therefore, what you please to ask of me:
As if I, also, may not have my ache!"

"My sort of ache? No, no! and yet—perhaps!
All comes of thinking you superior still.
But live and learn! I say! Time's up! Good jump!
You old, indeed! I fancy there 's a cut
Across the wood, a grass path: shall we try?
It 's venturesome, however!"

"Stop, my boy!
Don't think I 'm stingy of experience! Life
—It 's like this wood we leave. Should you and I
Go wandering about there, though the gaps
We went in and came out by were opposed
As the two poles, still, somehow, all the same,
By nightfall we should probably have chanced
On much the same main points of interest—
Both of us measured girth of mossy trunk,
Stript ivy from its strangled prey, clapped hands
At squirrel, sent a fir-cone after crow,
And so forth,—never mind what time betwixt.
So in our lives; allow I entered mine
Another way than you: 't is possible
I ended just by knocking head against

That plaguy low-hung branch yourself began
By getting bump from; as at last you too
May stumble o'er that stump which first of all
Bade me walk circumspectly. Head and feet
Are vulnerable both, and I, foot-sure,
Forgot that ducking down saves brow from bruise.
I, early old, played young man four years since
And failed confoundedly: so, hate alike
Failure and who caused failure,—curse her cant!"

"Oh, I see! You, though somewhat past the prime,
Were taken with a rosebud beauty! Ah—
But how should chits distinguish? She admired
Your marvel of a mind, I 'll undertake!
But as to body . . . nay, I mean . . . that is,
When years have told on face and figure . . ."

"Thanks,
Mister *Sufficiently-Instructed!* Such
No doubt was bound to be the consequence
To suit your self-complacency: she liked
My head enough, but loved some heart beneath
Some head with plenty of brown hair a-top
After my young friend's fashion! What becomes
Of that fine speech you made a minute since
About the man of middle age you found

A formidable peer at twenty-one?
So much for your mock-modesty! and yet
I back your first against this second sprout
Of observation, insight, what you please.
My middle age, Sir, had too much success!
It 's odd: my case occurred four years ago—
I finished just while you commenced that turn
I' the wood of life that takes us to the wealth
Of honeysuckle, heaped for who can reach.
Now, I don't boast: it 's bad style, and beside,
The feat proves easier than it looks: I plucked
Full many a flower unnamed in that bouquet
(Mostly of peonies and poppies, though!)
Good nature sticks into my button-hole.
Therefore it was with nose in want of snuff
Rather than Ess or Psidium, that I chanced
On what—so far from '*rosebud beauty*' . . . Well—
She 's dead: at least you never heard her name;
She was no courtly creature, had nor birth
Nor breeding—mere fine-lady-breeding; but
Oh, such a wonder of a woman! Grand
As a Greek statue! Stick fine clothes on that,
Style that a Duchess or a Queen,—you know,
Artists would make an outcry: all the more,
That she had just a statue's sleepy grace
Which broods o'er its own beauty. Nay, her fault

(Don't laugh!) was just perfection: for suppose
Only the little flaw, and I had peeped
Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.
At Rome some tourist raised the grit beneath
A Venus' forehead with his whittling-knife—
I wish,—now,—I had played that brute, brought blood
To surface from the depths I fancied chalk!
As it was, her mere face surprised so much
That I stopped short there, struck on heap, as stares
The cockney stranger at a certain bust
With drooped eyes,—she 's the thing I have in mind,—
Down at my Brother's. All sufficient prize—
Such outside! Now,—confound me for a prig!—
Who cares? I 'll make a clean breast once for all!
Beside, you 've heard the gossip. My life long
I 've been a woman-liker,—liking means
Loving and so on. There 's a lengthy list
By this time I shall have to answer for—
So say the good folk: and they don't guess half—
For the worst is, let once collecting-itch
Possess you, and, with perspicacity,
Keeps growing such a greediness that theft
Follows at no long distance,—there 's the fact!
I knew that on my Leporello-list
Might figure this, that, and the other name
Of feminine desirability,

But if I happened to desire inscribe,
Along with these, the only Beautiful—
Here was the unique specimen to snatch
Or now or never. 'Beautiful' I said—
'Beautiful' say in cold blood,—boiling then
To tune of '*Haste, secure whate'er the cost*
This rarity, die in the act, be damned,
So you complete collection, crown your list!'
It seemed as though the whole world, once aroused
By the first notice of such wonder's birth,
Would break bounds to contest my prize with me
The first discoverer, should she but emerge
From that safe den of darkness where she dozed
Till I stole in, that country-parsonage
Where, country-parson's daughter, motherless,
Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years
She had been vegetating lily-like.
Her father was my brother's tutor, got
The living that way: him I chanced to see—
Her I saw—her the world would grow one eye
To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all!
'*Secure her!*' cried the devil: '*afterward*
Arrange for the disposal of the prize!'
The devil's doing! yet I seem to think—
Now, when all 's done,—think with '*a head reposed*'

In French phrase—hope I think I meant to do
All requisite for such a rarity
When I should be at leisure, have due time
To learn requirement. But in evil day—
Bless me, at week's end, long as any year,
The father must begin '*Young Somebody,*
Much recommended—for I break a rule—
Comes here to read, next Long Vacation.' '*Young!*'
That did it. Had the epithet been '*rich,*'
'*Noble,*' '*a genius,*' even '*handsome,*'—but
—'*Young*'*!*"

"I say—just a word! I want to know—
You are not married?"

"I?"

"Nor ever were?"

"Never! Why?"

"Oh, then—never mind! Go on!
I had a reason for the question."

"Come,—
You could not be the young man?"

"No, indeed!
Certainly—if you never married her!"

"That I did not: and there's the curse, you'll see!
Nay, all of it's one curse, my life's mistake
Which, nourished with manure that's warranted
To make the plant bear wisdom, blew out full
In folly beyond field-flower-foolishness!
The lies I used to tell my womankind,
Knowing they disbelieved me all the time
Though they required my lies, their decent due,
This woman—not so much believed, I'll say,
As just anticipated from my mouth:
Since being true, devoted, constant—she
Found constancy, devotion, truth, the plain
And easy commonplace of character.
No mock-heroics but seemed natural
To her who underneath the face, I knew
Was fairness' self, possessed a heart, I judged
Must correspond in folly just as far
Beyond the common,—and a mind to match,—
Not made to puzzle conjurers like me
Who, therein, proved the fool who fronts you, Sir,
And begs leave to cut short the ugly rest!
'*Trust me!*' I said: she trusted. '*Marry me!*'

Or rather, '*We are married: when, the rite?*'
That brought on the collector's next day qualm
At counting acquisition's cost. There lay
My marvel, there my purse more light by much
Because of its late lie-expenditure:
Ill-judged such moment to make fresh demand—
To cage as well as catch my rarity!
So, I began explaining. At first word
Outbroke the horror. '*Then, my truths were lies!*'
I tell you, such an outbreak, such new strange
All-unsuspected revelation—soul
As supernaturally grand as face
Was fair beyond example—that at once
Either I lost—or, if it please you, found
My senses,—stammered somehow—'*Jest! and now,*
Earnest! Forget all else but—heart has loved,
Does love, shall love you ever! take the hand!'
Not she! no marriage for superb disdain,
Contempt incarnate!"

"Yes, it 's different,—
It 's only like in being four years since.
I see now!"

"Well, what did disdain do next,
Think you?"

"That 's past me: did not marry you!—
That 's the main thing I care for, I suppose.
Turned nun, or what?"

"Why, married in a month
Some parson, some smug crop-haired smooth-chinned sort
Of curate-creature, I suspect,—dived down,
Down, deeper still, and came up somewhere else—
I don't know where—I 've not tried much to know,—
In short, she 's happy: what the clodpoles call
'Countrified' with a vengeance! leads the life
Respectable and all that drives you mad:
Still—where, I don't know, and that 's best for both."

"Well, that she did not like you, I conceive.
But why should you hate her, I want to know?"

"My good young friend,—because or her or else
Malicious Providence I have to hate.
For, what I tell you proved the turning-point
Of my whole life and fortune toward success
Or failure. If I drown, I lay the fault
Much on myself who caught at reed not rope,
But more on reed which, with a packthread's pith,
Had buoyed me till the minute's cramp could thaw

And I strike out afresh and so be saved.
It 's easy saying—I had sunk before,
Disqualified myself by idle days
And busy nights, long since, from holding hard
On cable, even, had fate cast me such!
You boys don't know how many times men fail
Perforce o' the little to succeed i' the large,
Husband their strength, let slip the petty prey,
Collect the whole power for the final pounce.
My fault was the mistaking man's main prize
For intermediate boy's diversion; clap
Of boyish hands here frightened game away
Which, once gone, goes for ever. Oh, at first
I took the anger easily, nor much
Minded the anguish—having learned that storms
Subside, and teapot-tempests are akin.
Time would arrange things, mend whate'er might be
Somewhat amiss; precipitation, eh?
Reason and rhyme prompt—reparation! Tiffs
End properly in marriage and a dance!
I said 'We 'll marry, make the past a blank'—
And never was such damnable mistake!
That interview, that laying bare my soul,
As it was first, so was it last chance—one
And only. Did I write? Back letter came
Unopened as it went. Inexorable

She fled, I don't know where, consoled herself
With the smug curate-creature: chop and change!
Sure am I, when she told her shaveling all
His Magdalen's adventure, tears were shed,
Forgiveness evangelically shown,
'Loose hair and lifted eye,'—as someone says.
And now, he's worshipped for his pains, the sneak!"

"Well, but your turning-point of life,—what 's here
To hinder you contesting Finsbury
With Orton, next election? I don't see . . ."

"Not you! But *I* see. Slowly, surely, creeps
Day by day o'er me the conviction—here
Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go!
—That with her—may be, for her—I had felt
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all the fancies sluggish here
I' the head that needs the hand she would not take
And I shall never lift now. Lo, your wood—
Its turnings which I likened life to! Well,—
There she stands, ending every avenue,
Her visionary presence on each goal
I might have gained had we kept side by side!
Still string nerve and strike foot? Her frown forbids:
The steam congeals once more: I 'm old again!

Therefore I hate myself—but how much worse
Do not I hate who would not understand,
Let me repair things—no, but sent a-slide
My folly falteringly, stumblingly
Down, down and deeper down until I drop
Upon—the need of your ten thousand pounds
And consequently loss of mine! I lose
Character, cash, nay, common-sense itself
Recounting such a lengthy cock-and-bull
Adventure—lose my temper in the act . . ."

"And lose beside,—if I may supplement
The list of losses,—train and ten-o'clock!
Hark, pant and puff, there travels the swart sign!
So much the better! You 're my captive now!
I 'm glad you trust a fellow: friends grow thick
This way—that 's twice said; we were thickish, though,
Even last night, and, ere night comes again,
I prophesy good luck to both of us!
For see now!—back to '*balmy eminence*'
Or '*calm acclivity*,' or what 's the word!
Bestow you there an hour, concoct at ease
A sonnet for the Album, while I put
Bold face on, best foot forward, make for house,
March in to aunt and niece, and tell the truth—
(Even white-lying goes against my taste

After your little story). Oh, the niece
Is rationality itself! The aunt—
If she 's amenable to reason too—
Why, you stopped short to pay her due respect,
And let the Duke wait (I 'll work well the Duke).
If she grows gracious, I return for you;
If thunder 's in the air, why—bear your doom,
Dine on rump-steaks and port, and shake the dust
Of aunty from your shoes as off you go
By evening-train, nor give the thing a thought
How you shall pay me—that 's as sure as fate,
Old fellow! Off with you, face left about!
Yonder 's the path I have to pad. You see,
I 'm in good spirits, God knows why! Perhaps
Because the woman did not marry you
—Who look so hard at me,—and have the right,
One must be fair and own."

The two stand still
Under an oak.

"Look here!" resumes the youth.
"I never quite knew how I came to like
You—so much—whom I ought not court at all:
Nor how you had a leaning just to me
Who am assuredly not worth your pains.

For there must needs be plenty such as you
Somewhere about,—although I can't say where,—
Able and willing to teach all you know;
While—how can you have missed a score like me
With money and no wit, precisely each
A pupil for your purpose, were it—ease
Fool's poke of tutor's *honorarium*-fee?
And yet, howe'er it came about, I felt
At once my master: you as prompt descried
Your man, I warrant, so was bargain struck.
Now, these same lines of liking, loving, run
Sometimes so close together they converge—
Life's great adventures—you know what I mean—
In people. Do you know, as you advanced,
It got to be uncommonly like fact
We two had fallen in with—liked and loved
Just the same woman in our different ways?
I began life—poor groundling as I prove—
Winged and ambitious to fly high: why not?
There 's something in 'Don Quixote' to the point,
My shrewd old father used to quote and praise—
'*Am I born man?*' asks Sancho: '*being man,*
By possibility I may be Pope!'
So, Pope I meant to make myself, by step
And step, whereof the first should be to find
A perfect woman; and I tell you this—

If what I fixed on, in the order due
Of undertakings, as next step, had first
Of all disposed itself to suit my tread,
And I had been, the day I came of age,
Returned at head of poll for Westminster
—Nay, and moreover summoned by the Queen
At week's end, when my maiden-speech bore fruit,
To form and head a Tory ministry—
It would not have seemed stranger, no, nor been
More strange to me, as now I estimate,
Than what did happen—sober truth, no dream.
I saw my wonder of a woman,—laugh,
I 'm past that!—in Commemoration-week.
A plenty have I seen since, fair and foul,—
With eyes, too, helped by your sagacious wink;
But one to match that marvel—no least trace,
Least touch of kinship and community!
The end was—I did somehow state the fact,
Did, with no matter what imperfect words,
One way or other give to understand
That woman, soul and body were her slave
Would she but take, but try them—any test
Of will, and some poor test of power beside:
So did the strings within my brain grow tense
And capable of . . . hang similitudes!
She answered kindly but beyond appeal.

'No sort of hope for me, who came too late.
She was another's. Love went—mine to her,
Hers just as loyally to someone else.'
Of course! I might expect it! Nature's law—
Given the peerless woman, certainly
Somewhere shall be the peerless man to match!
I acquiesced at once, submitted me
In something of a stupor, went my way.
I fancy there had been some talk before
Of somebody—her father or the like—
To coach me in the holidays,—that 's how
I came to get the sight and speech of her,—
But I had sense enough to break off sharp,
Save both of us the pain."

"Quite right there!"

"Eh?
Quite wrong, it happens! Now comes worst of all!
Yes, I did sulk aloof and let alone
The lovers—*I* disturb the angel-mates?"

"Seraph paired off with cherub!"

"Thank you! While
I never plucked up courage to inquire

Who he was, even,—certain-sure of this,
That nobody I knew of had blue wings
And wore a star-crown as he needs must do,—
Some little lady,—plainish, pock-marked girl,—
Finds out my secret in my woeful face,
Comes up to me at the Apollo Ball,
And pityingly pours her wine and oil
This way into the wound: '*Dear f-f-friend,*
Why waste affection thus on—must I say,
A somewhat worthless object? Who's her choice—
Irrevocable as deliberate—
Out of the wide world? I shall name no names—
But there's a person in society,
Who, blessed with rank and talent, has grown
grey
In idleness and sin of every sort
Except hypocrisy: he's thrice her age,
A by-word for "successes with the sex"
As the French say—and, as we ought to say,
Consummately a liar and a rogue,
Since—show me where's the woman won without
The help of this one lie which she believes—
That—never mind how things have come to pass,
And let who loves have loved a thousand times—
All the same he now loves her only, loves
Her ever! if by "won" you just mean "sold,"

That's quite another compact. Well, this scamp,
Continuing descent from bad to worse,
Must leave his fine and fashionable prey
(Who—fathered, brothered, husbanded,—are hedged
About with thorny danger) and apply
His arts to this poor country ignorance
Who sees forthwith in the first rag of man
Her model hero! Why continue waste
On such a woman treasures of a heart
Would yet find solace,—yes, my f-f-friend—
In some congenial—fiddle-diddle-dee?'"

"Pray, is the pleasant gentleman described
Exact the portrait which my '*f-f-friends*'
Recognize as so like? 'T is evident
You half surmised the sweet original
Could be no other than myself, just now!
Your stop and start were flattering!"

"Of course
Caricature 's allowed for in a sketch!
The longish nose becomes a foot in length,
The swarthy cheek gets copper-coloured,—still,
Prominent beak and dark-hued skin are facts:
And '*parson's daughter*'—'*young man coachable*'—
'*Elderly party*'—'*four years since*'—were facts

To fasten on, a moment! Marriage, though—
That made the difference, I hope."

"All right!
I never married; wish I had—and then
Unwish it: people kill their wives, sometimes!
I hate my mistress, but I 'm murder-free.
In your case, where 's the grievance? You came last,
The earlier bird picked up the worm. Suppose
You, in the glory of your twenty-one,
Had happened to precede myself! 't is odds
But this gigantic juvenility,
This offering of a big arm's bony hand—
I 'd rather shake than feel shake me, I know—
Had moved *my* dainty mistress to admire
An altogether new Ideal—deem
Idolatry less due to life's decline
Productive of experience, powers mature
By dint of usage, the made man—no boy
That 's all to make! I was the earlier bird—
And what I found, I let fall; what you missed
Who is the fool that blames you for?"

"Myself—
For nothing, everything! For finding out
She, whom I worshipped, was a worshipper

In turn of . . . but why stir up settled mud?
She married him—the fifty-years-old rake—
How you have teased the talk from me! At last
My secret 's told you. I inquired no more,
Nay, stopped ears when informants unshut mouth;
Enough that she and he live, deuce take where,
Married and happy, or else miserable—
It 's 'Cut-the-pack;' she turned up ace or knave,
And I left Oxford, England, dug my hole
Out in Dalmatia, till you drew me thence
Badger-like,—'*Back to London*' was the word—
'*Do things, a many, there, you fancy hard,*
I'll undertake are easy!'—the advice.
I took it, had my twelvemonth's fling with you—
(Little hand holding large hand pretty tight
For all its delicacy—eh, my lord?),
Until when, t' other day, I got a turn
Somehow and gave up tired: and '*Rest!*' bade you,
'*Marry your cousin, double your estate,*
And take your ease by all means!' So, I loll
On this the springy sofa, mine next month—
Or should loll, but that you must needs beat rough
The very down you spread me out so smooth.
I wish this confidence were still to make!
Ten thousand pounds? You owe me twice the sum
For stirring up the black depths! There 's repose

Or, at least, silence when misfortune seems
All that one has to bear; but folly—yes,
Folly, it all was! Fool to be so meek,
So humble,—such a coward rather say!
Fool, to adore the adorer of a fool!
Not to have faced him, tried (a useful hint)
My big and bony, here, against the bunch
Of lily-coloured five with signet-ring,
Most like, for little-finger's sole defence—
Much as you flaunt the blazon there! I grind
My teeth, that bite my very heart, to think—
To know I might have made that woman mine
But for the folly of the coward—know—
Or what 's the good of my apprenticeship
This twelvemonth to a master in the art?
Mine—had she been mine—just one moment mine
For honour, for dishonour—anyhow,
So that my life, instead of stagnant . . . Well,
You 've poked and proved stagnation is not sleep—
Hang you!"

"Hang *you* for an ungrateful goose!
All this means—I who since I knew you first
Have helped you to conceit yourself this cock
O' the dunghill with all hens to pick and choose—
Ought to have helped you when shell first was chipped

By chick that wanted prompting '*Use the spur!*'
While I was elsewhere putting mine to use.
As well might I blame you who kept aloof,
Seeing you could not guess I was alive,
Never advised me '*Do as I have done—*
Reverence such a jewel as your luck
Has scratched up to enrich unworthiness!'
As your behaviour was should mine have been,
—Faults which we both, too late, are sorry for:
Opposite ages, each with its mistake!
'*If youth but would—if age but could*,' you know.
Don't let us quarrel. Come, we're—young and old—
Neither so badly off. Go you your way,
Cut to the Cousin! I 'll to Inn, await
The issue of diplomacy with Aunt,
And wait my hour on '*calm acclivity*'
In rumination manifold—perhaps
About ten thousand pounds I have to pay!"

III.

Now, as the elder lights the fresh cigar
Conducive to resource, and saunteringly
Betakes him to the left-hand backward path,—
While, much sedate, the younger strides away
To right and makes for—islanded in lawn
And edged with shrubbery—the brilliant bit
Of Barry's building that 's the Place,—a pair
Of women, at this nick of time, one young,
One very young, are ushered with due pomp
Into the same Inn-parlour—"*disengaged*
Entirely now!" the obsequious landlord smiles,
"*Since the late occupants—whereof but one*
Was quite a stranger'—(smile enforced by bow)
"*Left, a full two hours since, to catch the train,*
Probably for the stranger's sake!" (Bow, smile,
And backing out from door soft-closed behind.)

Woman and girl, the two, alone inside,
Begin their talk: the girl, with sparkling eyes—

"Oh, I forewent him purposely! but you,
Who joined at—journeyed from the Junction here—
I wonder how he failed your notice. Few
Stop at our station: fellow-passengers
Assuredly you were—I saw indeed
His servant, therefore he arrived all right.
I wanted, you know why, to have you safe
Inside here first of all, so dodged about
The dark end of the platform; that 's his way—
To swing from station straight to avenue
And stride the half a mile for exercise.
I fancied you might notice the huge boy.
He soon gets o'er the distance; at the house
He 'll hear I went to meet him and have missed;
He 'll wait. No minute of the hour 's too much
Meantime for our preliminary talk:
First word of which must be—O good beyond
Expression of all goodness—you to come!"

The elder, the superb one, answers slow.

"There was no helping that. You called for me,
Cried, rather: and my old heart answered you.
Still, thank me! since the effort breaks a vow—
At least, a promise to myself."

"I know!
How selfish get you happy folk to be!
If I should love my husband, must I needs
Sacrifice straightway all the world to him,
As you do? Must I never dare leave house
On this dread Arctic expedition, out
And in again, six mortal hours, though you,
You even, my own friend for evermore,
Adjure me—fast your friend till rude love pushed
Poor friendship from her vantage—just to grant
The quarter of a whole day's company
And counsel? This makes counsel so much more
Need and necessity. For here 's my block
Of stumbling: in the face of happiness
So absolute, fear chills me. If such change
In heart be but love's easy consequence,
Do I love? If to marry mean—let go
All I now live for, should my marriage be?"

The other never once has ceased to gaze
On the great elm-tree in the open, posed
Placidly full in front, smooth bole, broad branch,
And leafage, one green plenitude of May.
The gathered thought runs into speech at last.

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful

Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,
Sun-warmth, dew-coolness,—squirrel, bee and bird,
High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims
'*Leave earth, there's nothing better till next step*
Heavenward!'—so, off flies what has wings to help!"

And henceforth they alternate. Says the girl—

"That's saved then: marriage spares the early taste."

"Four years now, since my eye took note of tree!"

"If I had seen no other tree but this
My life long, while yourself came straight, you said,
From tree which overstretched you and was just
One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held
Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,
And magic fruits whereon the angels feed—
I looking out of window on a tree
Like yonder—otherwise well-known, much-liked,
Yet just an English ordinary elm—
What marvel if you cured me of conceit
My elm's bird-bee-and-squirrel tenantry
Was quite the proud possession I supposed?
And there is evidence you tell me true.
The fairy marriage-tree reports itself

Good guardian of the perfect face and form,
Fruits of four years' protection! Married friend,
You are more beautiful than ever!"

"Yes:
I think that likely. I could well dispense
With all thought fair in feature, mine or no,
Leave but enough of face to know me by—
With all found fresh in youth except such strength
As lets a life-long labour earn repose
Death sells at just that price, they say; and so,
Possibly, what I care not for, I keep."

"How you must know he loves you! Chill, before,
Fear sinks to freezing. Could I sacrifice—
Assured my lover simply loves my soul—
One nose-breadth of fair feature? No, indeed!
Your own love . . ."

"The preliminary hour—
Don't waste it!"

"But I can't begin at once!
The angel's self that comes to hear me speak
Drives away all the care about the speech.
What an angelic mystery you are—

Now—that is certain! when I knew you first,
No break of halo and no bud of wing!
I thought I knew you, saw you, round and through,
Like a glass ball; suddenly, four years since,
You vanished, how and whither? Mystery!
Wherefore? No mystery at all: you loved,
Were loved again, and left the world of course:
Who would not? Lapped four years in fairyland,
Out comes, by no less wonderful a chance,
The changeling, touched athwart her trellised bliss
Of blush-rose bower by just the old friend's voice
That 's now struck dumb at her own potency.
I talk of my small fortunes? Tell me yours
Rather! The fool I ever was—I am,
You see that: the true friend you ever had,
You have, you also recognize. Perhaps,
Giving you all the love of all my heart,
Nature, that 's niggard in me, has denied
The after-birth of love there 's someone claims
—This huge boy, swinging up the avenue;
And I want counsel: is defect in me,
Or him who has no right to raise the love?
My cousin asks my hand: he 's young enough,
Handsome,—my maid thinks,—manly 's more the word:
He asked my leave to '*drop*' the elm-tree there,

Some morning before breakfast. Gentleness
Goes with the strength, of course. He 's honest too,
Limpidly truthful. For ability—
All 's in the rough yet. His first taste of life
Seems to have somehow gone against the tongue:
He travelled, tried things—came back, tried still more—
He says he 's sick of all. He 's fond of me
After a certain careless-earnest way
I like: the iron 's crude,—no polished steel
Somebody forged before me. I am rich—
That 's not the reason, he 's far richer: no,
Nor is it that he thinks me pretty,—frank
Undoubtedly on that point! He saw once
The pink of face-perfection—oh, not you—
Content yourself, my beauty!—for she proved
So thoroughly a cheat, his charmer . . . nay,
He runs into extremes, I 'll say at once,
Lest you say! Well, I understand he wants
Someone to serve, something to do: and both
Requisites so abound in me and mine
That here 's the obstacle which stops consent:
The smoothness is too smooth, and I mistrust
The unseen cat beneath the counterpane.
Therefore I thought '*Would she but judge for me,*
Who, judging for herself succeeded so!'

Do I love him, does he love me, do both
Mistake for knowledge—easy ignorance?
Appeal to its proficient in each art!
I got rough-smooth through a piano-piece,
Rattled away last week till tutor came,
Heard me to end, then grunted '*Ach, mein Gott!*
Sagen Sie "easy"? Every note is wrong.
All thumped mit wrist: we'll trouble fingers now.
The Fraulein will please roll up Raff again
And exercise at Czerny for one month!'
Am I to roll up cousin, exercise
At Trollope's novels for one month? Pronounce!"

"Now, place each in the right position first,
Adviser and advised one! I perhaps
Am three—nay, four years older; am, beside,
A wife: advantages—to balance which,
You have a full fresh joyous sense of life
That finds you out life's fit food everywhere,
Detects enjoyment where I, slow and dull,
Fumble at fault. Already, these four years,
Your merest glimpses at the world without
Have shown you more than ever met my gaze;
And now, by joyance you inspire joy,—learn
While you profess to teach, and teach, although
Avowedly a learner. I am dazed

Like any owl by sunshine which just sets
The sparrow preening plumage! Here 's to spy
—Your cousin! You have scanned him all your life,
Little or much; I never saw his face.
You have determined on a marriage—used
Deliberation therefore—I 'll believe
No otherwise, with opportunity
For judgment so abounding! Here stand I—
Summoned to give my sentence, for a whim,
(Well, at first cloud-fleck thrown athwart your blue)
Judge what is strangeness' self to me,—say '*Wed!*'
Or '*Wed not!*' whom you promise I shall judge
Presently, at propitious lunch-time, just
While he carves chicken! Sends he leg for wing?
That revelation into character
And conduct must suffice me! Quite as well
Consult with yonder solitary crow
That eyes us from your elm-top!"

"Still the same!
Do you remember, at the library
We saw together somewhere, those two books
Somebody said were noticeworthy? One
Lay wide on table, sprawled its painted leaves
For all the world's inspection; shut on shelf
Reclined the other volume, closed, clasped, locked—

Clear to be let alone. Which page had we
Preferred the turning over of? You were,
Are, ever will be the locked lady, hold
Inside you secrets written,—soul-absorbed,
My ink upon your blotting-paper. *I*—
What trace of you have I to show in turn?
Delicate secrets! No one juvenile
Ever essayed at croquet and performed
Superiorly but I confided you
The sort of hat he wore and hair it held.
While you? One day a calm note comes by post:
'*I am just married, you may like to hear.*'
Most men would hate you, or they ought; we love
What we fear,—*I* do! '*Cold*' I shall expect
My cousin calls you. I—dislike not him,
But (if I comprehend what loving means)
Love you immeasurably more—more—more
Than even he who, loving you his wife,
Would turn up nose at who impertinent,
Frivolous, forward—*loves* that excellence
Of all the earth he bows in worship to!
And who 's this paragon of privilege?
Simply a country parson: his the charm
That worked the miracle! Oh, too absurd
But that you stand before me as you stand!
Such beauty does prove something, everything!

Beauty 's the prize-flower which dispenses eye
From peering into what has nourished root—
Dew or manure: the plant best knows its place.
Enough, from teaching youth and tending age
And hearing sermons,—haply writing tracts,—
From such strange love-besprinkled compost, lo,
Out blows this triumph! Therefore love 's the soil
Plants find or fail of. You, with wit to find,
Exercise wit on the old friend's behalf,
Keep me from failure! Scan and scrutinize
This cousin! Surely he 's as worth your pains
To study as my elm-tree, crow and all,
You still keep staring at. I read your thoughts."

"At last?"

"At first! '*Would, tree, a-top of thee*
I winged were, like crow perched moveless there,
And so could straightway soar, escape this bore,
Back to my nest where broods whom I love best—
The parson o'er his parish—garish—rarish—
Oh I could bring the rhyme in if I tried:
The Album here inspires me! Quite apart
From lyrical expression, have I read
The stare aright, and sings not soul just so?"

"Or rather *so?* '*Cool comfortable elm*
That men make coffins out of,—none for me
At thy expense, so thou permit I glide
Under thy ferny feet, and there sleep, sleep,
Nor dread awaking though in heaven itself!'"

The younger looks with face struck sudden white.
The elder answers its inquiry.

"Dear,
You are a guesser, not a '*clairvoyante.*'
I 'll so far open you the locked and shelved
Volume, my soul, that you desire to see,
As let you profit by the title-page——"

"*Paradise Lost?*"

"*Inferno!*—All which comes
Of tempting me to break my vow. Stop here!
Friend, whom I love the best in the whole world,
Come at your call, be sure that I will do
All your requirement—see and say my mind.
It may be that by sad apprenticeship
I have a keener sense: I 'll task the same.
Only indulge me—here let sight and speech
Happen—this Inn is neutral ground, you know!

I cannot visit the old house and home,
Encounter the old sociality
Abjured for ever. Peril quite enough
In even this first—last, I pray it prove—
Renunciation of my solitude!
Back, you, to house and cousin! Leave me here,
Who want no entertainment, carry still
My occupation with me. While I watch
The shadow inching round those ferny feet,
Tell him '*A school-friend wants a word with me*
Up at the inn: time, tide and train won't wait:
I must go see her—on and off again—
You'll keep me company?' Ten minutes' talk,
With you in presence, ten more afterward
With who, alone, convoys me station-bound,
And I see clearly—and say honestly
To-morrow: pen shall play tongue's part, you know.
Go—quick! for I have made our hand-in-hand
Return impossible. So scared you look,—
If cousin does not greet you with '*What ghost*
Has crossed your path?' I set him down obtuse."

And after one more look, with face still white,
The younger does go, while the elder stands
Occupied by the elm at window there.

IV.

Occupied by the elm; and, as its shade
Has crept clock-hand-wise till it ticks at fern
Five inches further to the South, the door
Opens abruptly, someone enters sharp,
The elder man returned to wait the youth:
Never observes the room's new occupant,
Throws hat on table, stoops quick, elbow-propped
Over the Album wide there, bends down brow
A cogitative minute, whistles shrill,
Then,—with a cheery-hopeless laugh-and-lose
Air of defiance to fate visibly
Casting the toils about him,—mouths once more
"*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*"
Then clasps-to cover, sends book spinning off
T' other side table, looks up, starts erect
Full-face with her who,—roused from that abstruse
Question, "*Will next tick tip the fern or no?*",—
Fronts him as fully.

All her languor breaks,

Away withers at once the weariness
From the black-blooded brow, anger and hate
Convulse. Speech follows slowlier, but at last—

"You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!
Knew, by some subtle undivinable
Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,
Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave
Safe hiding and come take of him arrears,
My torment due on four years' respite! Time
To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'er wound!
Have your success! Be satisfied this sole
Seeing you has undone all heaven could do
These four years, puts me back to you and hell!
What will next trick be, next success? No doubt
When I shall think to glide into the grave,
There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,
And catch and capture me for evermore!
But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all!
Contest him for me! Strive, for he is strong!"

Already his surprise dies palely out
In laugh of acquiescing impotence.
He neither gasps nor hisses: calm and plain—

"I also felt and knew—but otherwise!

You out of hand and sight and care of me
These four years, whom I felt, knew, all the while . . .
Oh, it 's no superstition ! It 's a gift
O' the gamester that he snuffs the unseen powers
Which help or harm him. Well I knew what lurked,
Lay perdue paralysing me,—drugged, drowsed
And damnified my soul and body both !
Down and down, see where you have dragged me to,
You and your malice ! I was, four years since,
—Well, a poor creature ! I become a knave.
I squandered my own pence : I plump my purse
With other people's pounds. I practised play
Because I liked it : play turns labour now
Because there 's profit also in the sport.
I gamed with men of equal age and craft :
I steal here with a boy as green as grass
Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure
This long while, just to bring about to-day
When the boy beats me hollow, buries me
In ruin who was sure to beggar him.
O time indeed I should look up and laugh
'*Surely she closes on me!*' Here you stand ! "

And stand she does : while volubility,
With him, keeps on the increase, for his tongue
After long locking-up is loosed for once.

"Certain the taunt is happy!" he resumes:
"So, I it was allured you—only I
—I, and none other—to this spectacle—
Your triumph, my despair—you woman-fiend
That front me! Well, I have my wish, then! See
The low wide brow oppressed by sweeps of hair
Darker and darker as they coil and swathe
The crowned corpse-wanness whence the eyes burn
black
Not asleep now! not pin-points dwarfed beneath
Either great bridging eyebrow—poor blank beads—
Babies, I 've pleased to pity in my time:
How they protrude and glow immense with hate!
The long triumphant nose attains—retains
Just the perfection; and there 's scarlet-skein
My ancient enemy, her lip and lip,
Sense-free, sense-frighting lips clenched cold and
bold
Because of chin, that based resolve beneath!
Then the columnar neck completes the whole
Greek-sculpture-baffling body! Do I see?
Can I observe? You wait next word to come?
Well, wait and want! since no one blight I bid
Consume one least perfection. Each and all,
As they are rightly shocking now to me,
So may they still continue! Value them?

Ay, as the vendor knows the money-worth
Of his Greek statue, fools aspire to buy,
And he to see the back of! Let us laugh!
You have absolved me from my sin at least!
You stand stout, strong, in the rude health of hate,
No touch of the tame timid nullity
My cowardice, forsooth, has practised on!
Ay, while you seemed to hint some fine fifth act
Of tragedy should freeze blood, end the farce,
I never doubted all was joke. I kept,
May be, an eye alert on paragraphs,
Newspaper-notice,—let no inquest slip,
Accident, disappearance: sound and safe
Were you, my victim, not of mind to die!
So, my worst fancy that could spoil the smooth
Of pillow, and arrest descent of sleep
Was '*Into what dim hole can she have dived,*
She and her wrongs, her woe that's wearing flesh
And blood away?' Whereas, see, sorrow swells!
Or, fattened, fulsome, have you fed on me,
Sucked out my substance? How much gloss, I pray,
O'erbloomed those hair-swathes when there crept from you
To me that craze, else unaccountable,
Which urged me to contest our county-seat
With whom but my own brother's nominee?

Did that mouth's pulp glow ruby from carmine
While I misused my moment, pushed,—one word,—
One hair's breadth more of gesture,—idiot-like
Past passion, floundered on to the grotesque,
And lost the heiress in a grin? At least,
You made no such mistake! You tickled fish,
Landed your prize the true artistic way!
How did the smug young curate rise to tune
Of '*Friend, a fatal fact divides us. Love*
Suits me no longer. I have suffered shame,
Betrayal: past is past; the future—yours—
Shall never be contaminate by mine.
I might have spared me this confession, not
—Oh, never by some hideousest of lies,
Easy, impenetrable! No! but say,
By just the quiet answer—"I am cold."
Falsehood avaunt, each shadow of thee, hence!
Had happier fortune willed . . . but dreams are vain.
Now, leave me—yes, for pity's sake!' Aha,
Who fails to see the curate as his face
Reddened and whitened, wanted handkerchief
At wrinkling brow and twinkling eye, until
Out burst the proper '*Angel, whom the fiend*
Has thought to smirch,—thy whiteness, at one wipe
Of holy cambric, shall disgrace the swan!
Mine be the task' . . . and so forth! Fool? not he!

Cunning in flavours, rather! What but sour
Suspected makes the sweetness doubly sweet,
And what stings love from faint to flamboyant
But the fear-sprinkle? Even horror helps—
'*Love's flame in me by such recited wrong*
Drenched, quenched, indeed? It burns the fiercelier
thence!'
Why, I have known men never love their wives
Till somebody—myself, suppose—had '*drenched*
And quenched love,' so the blockheads whined: as if
The fluid fire that lifts the torpid limb
Were a wrong done to palsy. But I thrilled
No palsied person: half my age, or less,
The curate was, I 'll wager: o'er young blood
Your beauty triumphed! Eh, but—was it *he*?
Then, it *was* he, I heard of! None beside!
How frank you were about the audacious boy
Who fell upon you like a thunderbolt—
Passion and protestation! He it was
Reserved *in petto!* Ay, and '*rich*' beside—
'*Rich*'—how supremely did disdain curl nose!
All that I heard was—'*wedded to a priest;*'
Informants sunk youth, riches and the rest.
And so my lawless love disparted loves,
That loves might come together with a rush!
Surely this last achievement sucked me dry:

Indeed, that way my wits went. Mistress-queen,
Be merciful and let your subject slink
Into dark safety! He 's a beggar, see—
Do not turn back his ship, Australia-bound,
And bid her land him right amid some crowd
Of creditors, assembled by your curse!
Don't cause the very rope to crack (you can!)
Whereon he spends his last (friend's) sixpence, just
The moment when he hoped to hang himself!
Be satisfied you beat him!"

She replies—

"Beat him! I do. To all that you confess
Of abject failure, I extend belief.
Your very face confirms it: God is just!
Let my face—fix your eyes!—in turn confirm
What I shall say. All-abject 's but half truth;
Add to all-abject knave as perfect fool!
So is it you probed human nature, *so*
Prognosticated of me? Lay these words
To heart then, or where God meant heart should lurk!
That moment when you first revealed yourself,
My simple impulse prompted—end forthwith
The ruin of a life uprooted thus

To surely perish! How should such spoiled tree
Henceforward baulk the wind of its worst sport,
Fail to go falling deeper, falling down
From sin to sin until some depth were reached
Doomed to the weakest by the wickedest
Of weak and wicked human kind? But when,
That self-display made absolute,—behold
A new revealment!—round you pleased to veer,
Propose me what should prompt annul the past,
Make me '*amends by marriage*'—in your phrase,
Incorporate me henceforth, body and soul,
With soul and body which mere brushing past
Brought leprosy upon me—'*marry*' these!
Why, then despair broke, re-assurance dawned,
Clear-sighted was I that who hurled contempt
As I—thank God!—at the contemptible,
Was scarce an utter weakling. Rent away
By treason from my rightful pride of place,
I was not destined to the shame below.
A cleft had caught me: I might perish there,
But thence to be dislodged and whirled at last
Where the black torrent sweeps the sewage—no!
'*Bare breast be on hard rock*,' laughed out my soul
In gratitude, '*howe'er rock's grip may grind!*
The plain rough wretched holdfast shall suffice
This wreck of me!' The wind,—I broke in bloom

At passage of,—which stripped me bole and branch,
Twisted me up and tossed me here,—turns back,
And, playful ever, would replant the spoil?
Be satisfied, not one least leaf that 's mine
Shall henceforth help wind's sport to exercise!
Rather I give such remnant to the rock
Which never dreamed a straw would settle there.
Rock may not thank me, may not feel my breast,
Even: enough that *I* feel, hard and cold,
Its safety my salvation. Safe and saved,
I lived, live. When the tempter shall persuade
His prey to slip down, slide off, trust the wind,—
Now that I know if God or Satan be
Prince of the Power of the Air,—then, then, indeed,
Let my life end and degradation too!"

"Good!" he smiles, "true Lord Byron! '*Tree and rock:*'
'*Rock*'—there 's advancement! He 's at first a youth,
Rich, worthless therefore; next he grows a priest:
Youth, riches prove a notable resource,
When to leave me for their possessor gluts
Malice abundantly; and now, last change,
The young rich parson represents a rock
—Bloodstone, no doubt. He 's Evangelical?
Your Ritualists prefer the Church for spouse!"

She speaks.

"I have a story to relate.
There was a parish-priest, my father knew,
Elderly, poor: I used to pity him
Before I learned what woes are pity-worth.
Elderly was grown old now, scanty means
Were straitening fast to poverty, beside
The ailments which await in such a case.
Limited every way, a perfect man
Within the bounds built up and up since birth
Breast-high about him till the outside world
Was blank save o'erhead one blue bit of sky—
Faith: he had faith in dogma, small or great,
As in the fact that if he clave his skull
He 'd find a brain there: who proves such a fact
No falsehood by experiment at price
Of soul and body? The one rule of life
Delivered him in childhood was '*Obey! Labour!*' He had obeyed and laboured—tame,
True to the mill-track blinked on from above.
Some scholarship he may have gained in youth:
Gone—dropt or flung behind. Some blossom-flake,
Spring's boon, descends on every vernal head,
I used to think; but January joins
December, as his year had known no May

Trouble its snow-deposit,—cold and old!
I heard it was his will to take a wife,
A helpmate. Duty bade him tend and teach—
How? with experience null, nor sympathy
Abundant,—while himself worked dogma dead,
Who would play ministrant to sickness, age,
Womankind, childhood? These demand a wife.
Supply the want, then! theirs the wife; for him—
No coarsest sample of the proper sex
But would have served his purpose equally
With God's own angel,—let but knowledge match
Her coarseness: zeal does only half the work.
I saw this—knew the purblind honest drudge
Was wearing out his simple blameless life,
And wanted help beneath a burthen—borne
To treasure-house or dust-heap, what cared I?
Partner he needed: I proposed myself,
Nor much surprised him—duty was so clear!
Gratitude? What for? Gain of Paradise—
Escape, perhaps, from the dire penalty
Of who hides talent in a napkin? No:
His scruple was—should I be strong enough
—In body? since of weakness in the mind,
Weariness in the heart—no fear of these!
He took me as these Arctic voyagers
Take an aspirant to their toil and pain:

Can he endure them?—that 's the point, and not
—Will he? Who would not, rather! Whereupon,
I pleaded far more earnestly for leave
To give myself away, than you to gain
What you called priceless till you gained the heart
And soul and body! which, as beggars serve
Extorted alms, you straightway spat upon.
Not so my husband,—for I gained my suit,
And had my value put at once to proof.
Ask him! These four years I have died away
In village-life. The village? Ugliness
At best and filthiness at worst, inside.
Outside, sterility—earth sown with salt
Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.
The life? I teach the poor and learn, myself,
That commonplace to such stupidity
Is all-recondite. Being brutalized
Their true need is brute-language, cheery grunts
And kindly cluckings, no articulate
Nonsense that 's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the sick,
Sickened myself at pig-perversity,
Cat-craft, dog-snarling,—may be, snapping . . ."

"Brief:
You eat that root of bitterness called Man
—Raw: I prefer it cooked, with social sauce!

So, he was not the rich youth after all!
Well, I mistook. But somewhere needs must be
The compensation. If not young nor rich . . ."

"You interrupt."

"Because you 've daubed enough
Bistre for background. Play the artist now,
Produce your figure well-relieved in front!
The contrast—do not I anticipate?
Though neither rich nor young—what then? 'T is all
Forgotten, all this ignobility,
In the dear home, the darling word, the smile,
The something sweeter . . ."

"Yes, you interrupt.
I have my purpose and proceed. Who lives
With beasts assumes beast-nature, look and voice,
And, much more, thought, for beasts think. Selfishness
In us met selfishness in them, deserved
Such answer as it gained. My husband, bent
On saving his own soul by saving theirs,—
They, bent on being saved if saving soul
Included body's getting bread and cheese
Somehow in life and somehow after death,—

Both parties were alike in the same boat,
One danger, therefore one equality.
Safety induces culture: culture seeks
To institute, extend and multiply
The difference between safe man and man,
Able to live alone now; progress means
What but abandonment of fellowship?
We were in common danger, still stuck close.
No new books,—were the old ones mastered yet?
No pictures and no music: these divert
—What from? the staving danger off! You paint
The waterspout above, you set to words
The roaring of the tempest round you? Thanks!
Amusement? Talk at end of the tired day
Of the more tiresome morrow! I transcribed
The page on page of sermon-scrawlings—stopped
Intellect's eye and ear to sense and sound—
Vainly: the sound and sense would penetrate
To brain and plague there in despite of me
Maddened to know more moral good were done
Had we two simply sallied forth and preached
I' the '*Green*' they call their grimy,—I with twang
Of long-disused guitar,—with cut and slash
Of much-misvalued horsewhip he,—to bid
The peaceable come dance, the peace-breaker
Pay in his person! Whereas—Heaven and Hell,

Excite with that, restrain with this! So dealt
His drugs my husband; as he dosed himself,
He drenched his cattle: and, for all my part
Was just to dub the mortar, never fear
But drugs, hand pestled at, have poisoned nose!
Heaven he let pass, left wisely undescribed:
As applicable therefore to the sleep
I want, that knows no waking—as to what's
Conceived of as the proper prize to tempt
Souls less world-weary: there, no fault to find!
But Hell he made explicit. After death,
Life: man created new, ingeniously
Perfect for a vindictive purpose now
That man, first fashioned in beneficence,
Was proved a failure; intellect at length
Replacing old obtuseness, memory
Made mindful of delinquent's bygone deeds
Now that remorse was vain, which life-long lay
Dormant when lesson might be laid to heart;
New gift of observation up and down
And round man's self, new power to apprehend
Each necessary consequence of act
In man for well or ill—things obsolete—
Just granted to supplant the idiocy
Man's only guide while act was yet to choose,
With ill or well momentously its fruit;

A faculty of immense suffering
Conferred on mind and body,—mind, erewhile
Unvisited by one compunctious dream
During sin's drunken slumber, startled up,
Stung through and through by sin's significance
Now that the holy was abolished—just
As body which, alive, broke down beneath
Knowledge, lay helpless in the path to good,
Failed to accomplish aught legitimate,
Achieve aught worthy,—which grew old in youth,
And at its longest fell a cut-down flower,—
Dying, this too revived by miracle
To bear no end of burthen now that back
Supported torture to no use at all,
And live imperishably potent—since
Life's potency was impotent to ward
One plague off which made earth a hell before.
This doctrine, which one healthy view of things,
One sane sight of the general ordinance—
Nature,—and its particular object,—man,—
Which one mere eye-cast at the character
Of Who made these and gave man sense to boot,
Had dissipated once and evermore,—
This doctrine I have dosed our flock withal.
Why? Because none believed it. *They* desire
Such Heaven and dread such Hell, whom every day

The alehouse tempts from one, a dog-fight bids
Defy the other? All the harm is done
Ourselves—done my poor husband who in youth
Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still
Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I lead—
Thanks to you, knave! You learn its quality—
Thanks to me, fool!"

He eyes her earnestly,
But she continues.

"—Life which, thanks once more
To you, arch-knave as exquisitest fool,
I acquiescingly—I gratefully
Take back again to heart! and hence this speech
Which yesterday had spared you. Four years long
Life—I began to find intolerable,
Only this moment. Ere your entry just,
The leap of heart which answered, spite of me,
A friend's first summons, first provocative,
Authoritative, nay, compulsive call
To quit, though for a single day, my house
Of bondage—made return seem horrible.
I heard again a human lucid laugh
All trust, no fear; again saw earth pursue
Its narrow busy way amid small cares,

Smaller contentments, much weeds, some few flowers,—
Never suspicious of a thunderbolt
Avenging presently each daisy's death.
I recognized the beech-tree, knew the thrush
Repeated his old music-phrase,—all right,
How wrong was I, then! But your entry broke
Illusion, bade me back to bounds at once.
I honestly submit my soul: which sprang
At love, and losing love lies signed and sealed
'*Failure.*' No love more? then, no beauty more
Which tends to breed love! Purify my powers,
Effortless till some other world procure
Some other chance of prize! or, if none be,—
Nor second world nor chance,—undesecrate
Die then this aftergrowth of heart, surmised
Where May's precipitation left June blank!
Better have failed in the high aim, as I,
Than vulgarly in the low aim succeed
As, God be thanked, I do not! Ugliness
Had I called beauty, falsehood—truth, and you
—My lover! No—this earth 's unchanged for me,
By his enchantment whom God made the Prince
O' the Power o' the Air, into a Heaven: there is
Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation—earth.
I sit possessed in patience; prison-roof
Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead."

His smile is done with; he speaks bitterly.

"Take my congratulations, and permit
I wish myself had proved as teachable!
—Or, no! until you taught me, could I learn
A lesson from experience ne'er till now
Conceded? Please you listen while I show
How thoroughly you estimate my worth
And yours—the immeasurably superior! I
Believed at least in one thing, first to last,—
Your love to me: I was the vile and you
The precious; I abused you, I betrayed,
But doubted—never! Why else go my way
Judas-like plodding to this Potter's Field
Where fate now finds me? What has dinned my ear
And dogged my step? The spectre with the shriek
'*Such she was, such were you, whose punishment*
Is just!' And such she was not, all the while!
She never owned a love to outrage, faith
To pay with falsehood! For, my heart knows this—
Love once and you love always. Why, it's down
Here in the Album: every lover knows
Love may use hate but—turn to hate, itself—
Turn even to indifference—no, indeed!
Well, I have been spell-bound, deluded like
The witless negro by the Obeah-man

Who bids him wither: so, his eye grows dim,
His arm slack, arrow misses aim and spear
Goes wandering wide,—and all the woe because
He proved untrue to Fetish, who, he finds,
Was just a feather-phantom! I wronged love,
Am ruined,—and there was no love to wrong!"

"No love? Ah, dead love! I invoke thy ghost
To show the murderer where thy heart poured life
At summons of the stroke he doubts was dealt
On pasteboard and pretence! Not love, my love?
I changed for you the very laws of life:
Made you the standard of all right, all fair.
No genius but you could have been, no sage,
No sufferer—which is grandest—for the truth!
My hero—where the heroic only hid
To burst from hiding, brighten earth one day!
Age and decline were man's maturity;
Face, form were nature's type: more grace, more strength,
What had they been but just superfluous gauds,
Lawless divergence? I have danced through day
On tiptoe at the music of a word,
Have wondered where was darkness gone as night
Burst out in stars at brilliance of a smile!
Lonely, I placed the chair to help me seat
Your fancied presence; in companionship,

I kept my finger constant to your glove
Glued to my breast; then—where was all the world?
I schemed—not dreamed—how I might die some death
Should save your finger aching! Who creates
Destroys, he only: I had laughed to scorn
Whatever angel tried to shake my faith
And make you seem unworthy: you yourself
Only could do that! With a touch 't was done.
'*Give me all, trust me wholly!*' At the word,
I did give, I did trust—and thereupon
The touch did follow. Ah, the quiet smile,
The masterfully-folded arm in arm,
As trick obtained its triumph one time more!
In turn, my soul too triumphs in defeat:
Treason like faith moves mountains: love is gone!"

He paces to and fro, stops, stands quite close
And calls her by her name. Then—

"God forgives:
Forgive you, delegate of God, brought near
As never priests could bring him to this soul
That prays you both—forgive me! I abase—
Know myself mad and monstrous utterly
In all I did that moment; but as God
Gives me this knowledge—heart to feel and tongue

To testify—so be you gracious too!
Judge no man by the solitary work
Of—well, they do say and I can believe—
The devil in him: his, the moment,—mine
The life—your life!"

He names her name again.

"You were just—merciful as just, you were
In giving me no respite: punishment
Followed offending. Sane and sound once more,
The patient thanks decision, promptitude,
Which flung him prone and fastened him from hurt,
Haply to others, surely to himself.
I wake and would not you had spared one pang.
All 's well that ends well!"

Yet again her name.

"Had *you* no fault? Why must you change, forsooth,
Parts, why reverse positions, spoil the play?
Why did your nobleness look up to me,
Not down on the ignoble thing confessed?
Was it your part to stoop, or lift the low?
Wherefore did God exalt you? Who would teach
The brute man's tameness and intelligence

Must never drop the dominating eye:
Wink—and what wonder if the mad fit break,
Followed by stripes and fasting? Sound and sane,
My life, chastised now, couches at your foot.
Accept, redeem me! Do your eyes ask '*How?*'
I stand here penniless, a beggar; talk
What idle trash I may, this final blow
Of fortune fells me. *I* disburse, indeed,
This boy his winnings? when each bubble-scheme
That danced athwart my brain, a minute since,
The worse the better,—of repairing straight
My misadventure by fresh enterprise,
Capture of other boys in foolishness
His fellows,—when these fancies fade away
At first sight of the lost so long, the found
So late, the lady of my life, before
Whose presence I, the lost, am also found
Incapable of one least touch of mean
Expedient, I who teemed with plot and wile—
That family of snakes your eye bids flee!
Listen! Our troublesomest dreams die off
In daylight: I awake, and dream is—where?
I rouse up from the past: one touch dispels
England and all here. I secured long since
A certain refuge, solitary home
To hide in, should the head strike work one day,

The hand forget its cunning, or perhaps
Society grow savage,—there to end
My life's remainder, which, say what fools will,
Is or should be the best of life,—its fruit,
All tends to, root and stem and leaf and flower.
Come with me, love, loved once, loved only, come,
Blend loves there! Let this parenthetic doubt
Of love, in me, have been the trial-test
Appointed to all flesh at some one stage
Of soul's achievement,—when the strong man doubts
His strength, the good man whether goodness be,
The artist in the dark seeks, fails to find
Vocation, and the saint forswears his shrine.
What if the lover may elude, no more
Than these, probative dark, must search the sky
Vainly for love, his soul's star? But the orb
Breaks from eclipse: I breathe again: I love!
Tempted, I fell; but fallen—fallen lie
Here at your feet, see! Leave this poor pretence
Of union with a nature and its needs
Repugnant to your needs and nature! Nay,
False, beyond falsity you reprehend
In me, is such mock marriage with such mere
Man-mask as—whom you witless wrong, beside,
By that expenditure of heart and brain
He recks no more of than would yonder tree

If watered with your life-blood: rains and dews
Answer its ends sufficiently, while me
One drop saves—sends to flower and fruit at last
The laggard virtue in the soul which else
Cumbers the ground! Quicken me! Call me yours—
Yours and the world's—yours and the world's and
God's!
Yes, for you can, you only! Think! Confirm
Your instinct! Say, a minute since, I seemed
The castaway you count me,—all the more
Apparent shall the angelic potency
Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps
To light and life and love!—that 's love for you—
Love that already dares match might with yours.
You loved one worthy,—in your estimate,—
When time was; you descried the unworthy taint,
And where was love then? No such test could e'er
Try my love: but you hate me and revile;
Hatred, revilement—had you these to bear
Would you, as I do, nor revile, nor hate,
But simply love on, love the more, perchance?
Abide by your own proof! '*Your love was love:*
Its ghost knows no forgetting!' Heart of mine,
Would that I dared remember! Too unwise
Were he who lost a treasure, did himself
Enlarge upon the sparkling catalogue

Of gems to her his queen who trusted late
The keeper of her caskets! Can it be
That I, custodian of such relic still
As your contempt permits me to retain,
All I dare hug to breast is—'*How your glove*
Burst and displayed the long thin lily-streak!'
What may have followed—that is forfeit now!
I hope the proud man has grown humble. True—
One grace of humbleness absents itself—
Silence! yet love lies deeper than all words,
And not the spoken but the speechless love
Waits answer ere I rise and go my way."

Whereupon, yet one other time the name.

To end she looks the large deliberate look,
Even prolongs it somewhat; then the soul
Bursts forth in a clear laugh that lengthens on,
On, till—thinned, softened, silvered, one might say
The bitter runnel hides itself in sand,
Moistens the hard grey grimly comic speech.

"Ay—give the baffled angler even yet
His supreme triumph as he hales to shore
A second time the fish once 'scaped from hook:
So artfully has new bait hidden old

Blood-imbrued iron! Ay, no barb 's beneath
The gilded minnow here! You bid break trust,
This time, with who trusts me,—not simply bid
Me trust you, me who ruined but myself,
In trusting but myself! Since, thanks to you,
I know the feel of sin and shame,—be sure,
I shall obey you and impose them both
On one who happens to be ignorant
Although my husband—for the lure is love,
Your love! Try other tackle, fisher-friend!
Repentance, expiation, hopes and fears,
What you had been, may yet be, would I but
Prove helpmate to my hero—one and all
These silks and worsteds round the hook seduce
Hardly the late torn throat and mangled tongue.
Pack up, I pray, the whole assortment prompt!
Who wonders at variety of wile
In the Arch-cheat? You are the Adversary!
Your fate is of your choosing: have your choice!
Wander the world,—God has some end to serve
Ere he suppress you! He waits: I endure,
But interpose no finger-tip, forsooth,
To stop your passage to the pit. Enough
That I am stable, uninvolved by you
In the rush downwards: free I gaze and fixed;
Your smiles, your tears, prayers, curses move alike

My crowned contempt. You kneel? Prostrate yourself!
To earth, and would the whole world saw you there!"

Whereupon—"All right!" carelessly begins
Somebody from outside, who mounts the stair,
And sends his voice for herald of approach:
Half in half out the doorway as the door
Gives way to push.

"Old fellow, all 's no good!
The train 's your portion! Lay the blame on me!
I 'm no diplomatist, and Bismarck's self
Had hardly braved the awful Aunt at broach
Of proposition—so has world-repute
Preceded the illustrious stranger! Ah!—"

Quick the voice changes to astonishment,
Then horror, as the youth stops, sees, and knows.

The man who knelt starts up from kneeling, stands
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare.

One great red outbreak buries—throat and brow—
The lady's proud pale queenliness of scorn:
Then her great eyes that turned so quick, become
Intenser: quail at gaze, not they indeed!

v.

It is the young man shatters silence first.

" Well, my lord—for indeed my lord you are,
I little guessed how rightly—this last proof
Of lordship-paramount confounds too much
My simple head-piece! Let 's see how we stand
Each to the other! how we stood i' the game
Of life an hour ago,—the magpies, stile
And oak-tree witnessed. Truth exchanged for truth—
My lord confessed his four-years-old affair—
How he seduced and then forsook the girl
Who married somebody and left him sad.
My pitiful experience was—I loved
A girl whose gown's hem had I dared to touch
My finger would have failed me, palsy-fixed.
She left me, sad enough, to marry—whom?
A better man,—then possibly not you!
How does the game stand? Who is who and what
Is what, o' the board now, since an hour went by?

My lord's '*seduced, forsaken, sacrificed*,'
Starts up, my lord's familiar instrument,
Associate and accomplice, mistress-slave—
Shares his adventure, follows on the sly!
—Ay, and since 'bag and baggage' is a phrase—
Baggage lay hid in carpet-bag belike,
Was but unpadlocked when occasion came
For holding council, since my back was turned,
On how invent ten thousand pounds which, paid,
Would lure the winner to lose twenty more,
Beside refunding these! Why else allow
The fool to gain them? So displays herself
The lady whom my heart believed—oh, laugh!
Noble and pure: whom my heart loved at once,
And who at once did speak truth when she said
'*I am not mine now but another's*'—thus
Being that other's! Devil's-marriage, eh?
'*My lie weds thine till lucre us do part?*'
But pity me the snobbish simpleton,
You two aristocratic tip-top swells
At swindling! Quits, I cry! Decamp content
With skin I 'm peeled of: do not strip bones bare—
As that you could, I have no doubt at all!
O you two rare ones! Male and female, Sir!
The male there smirked, this morning, '*Come, my boy—*
Out with it! You 've been crossed in love, I think:

I recognize the lover's hangdog look;
Make a clean breast and match my confidence,
For, I'll be frank, I too have had my fling,
Am punished for my fault, and smart enough!
Where now the victim hides her head, God knows!'
Here loomed her head life-large, the devil knew!
Look out, Salvini! Here 's your man, your match!
He and I sat applauding, stall by stall,
Last Monday—'*Here 's Othello*' was our word,
'*But where 's Iago?*' Where? Why, there! And now
The fellow-artist, female specimen—
Oh, lady, you must needs describe yourself!
He 's great in art, but you—how greater still.
—(If I can rightly, out of all I learned,
Apply one bit of Latin that assures
'*Art means just art's concealment*')—tower yourself!
For he stands plainly visible henceforth—
Liar and scamp: while you, in artistry
Prove so consummate—or I prove perhaps
So absolute an ass—that—either way—
You still do seem to me who worshipped you
And see you take the homage of this man
Your master, who played slave and knelt, no doubt,
Before a mistress in his very craft . . .
Well, take the fact, I nor believe my eyes,
Nor trust my understanding! Still you seem

Noble and pure as when we had the talk
Under the tower, beneath the trees, that day.
And there 's the key explains the secret: down
He knelt to ask your leave to rise a grade
I' the mystery of humbug: well he may!
For how you beat him! Half an hour ago,
I held your master for my best of friends;
And now I hate him! Four years since, you seemed
My heart's one love: well, and you so remain!
What 's he to you in craft?"

She looks him through.

"My friend, 't is just that friendship have its turn—
Interrogate thus me whom one, of foes
The worst, has questioned and is answered by.
Take you as frank an answer! answers both
Begin alike so far, divergent soon
World-wide—I own superiority
Over you, over him. As him I searched,
So do you stand seen through and through by me
Who, this time, proud, report your crystal shrines
A dewdrop, plain as amber prisons round
A spider in the hollow heart his house!
Nowise are you that thing my fancy feared
When out you stepped on me, a minute since,

—This man's confederate! no, you step not thus
Obsequiously at beck and call to help
At need some second scheme, and supplement
Guile by force, use my shame to pinion me
From struggle and escape! I fancied that!
Forgive me! Only by strange chance,—most strange
In even this strange world,—you enter now,
Obtain your knowledge. Me you have not wronged
Who never wronged you—least of all, my friend,
That day beneath the College tower and trees,
When I refused to say,—'*not friend but, love!*'
Had I been found as free as air when first
We met, I scarcely could have loved you. No—
For where was that in you which claimed return
Of love? My eyes were all too weak to probe
This other's seeming, but that seeming loved
The soul in me, and lied—I know too late!
While your truth was truth: and I knew at once
My power was just my beauty—bear the word—
As I must bear, of all my qualities,
To name the poorest one that serves my soul
And simulates myself! So much in me
You loved, I know: the something that 's beneath
Heard not your call,—uncalled, no answer comes!
For, since in every love, or soon or late
Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,

Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day,
Take flight to find some other; so it proved—
Missing me, you were ready for this man.
I apprehend the whole relation: his—
The soul wherein you saw your type of worth
At once, true object of your tribute. Well
Might I refuse such half-heart's homage! Love
Divining, had assured you I no more
Stand his participant in infamy
Than you—I need no love to recognize
As simply dupe and nowise fellow-cheat!
Therefore accept one last friend's-word,—your friend's,
All men's friend, save a felon's. Ravel out
The bad embroilment howsoe'er you may,
Distribute as it please you praise or blame
To me—so you but fling this mockery far—
Renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham,
This poodle clipt to pattern, lion-like!
Throw him his thousands back, and lay to heart
The lesson I was sent,—if man discerned
Ever God's message,—just to teach. I judge—
To far another issue than could dream
Your cousin,—younger, fairer, as befits—
Who summoned me to judgment's exercise.
I find you, save in folly, innocent.
And in my verdict lies your fate; at choice

Of mine your cousin takes or leaves you. '*Take!*'
I bid her—for you tremble back to truth.
She turns the scale,—one touch of the pure hand
Shall so press down, emprison past relapse
Farther vibration 'twixt veracity—
That 's honest solid earth—and falsehood, theft
And air, that 's one illusive emptiness!
That reptile capture you? I conquered him.
You saw him cower before me. Have no fear
He shall offend you farther! Spare to spurn—
Safe let him slink hence till some subtler Eve
Than I, anticipate the snake—bruise head
Ere he bruise heel—or, warier than the first,
Some Adam purge earth's garden of its pest
Before the slaver spoil the Tree of Life!

"You! Leave this youth, as he leaves you, as I
Leave each! There 's caution surely extant yet
Though conscience in you were too vain a claim.
Hence quickly! Keep the cash but leave unsoiled
The heart I rescue and would lay to heal
Beside another's! Never let her know
How near came taint of your companionship!"

"Ah"—draws a long breath with a new strange look
The man she interpellates—soul a-stir

Under its covert, as, beneath the dust,
A coppery sparkle all at once denotes
The hid snake has conceived a purpose.

"Ah—
Innocence should be crowned with ignorance?
Desirable indeed, but difficult!
As if yourself, now, had not glorified
Your helpmate by imparting him a hint
Of how a monster made the victim bleed
Ere crook and courage saved her—hint, I say,—
Not the whole horror,—that were needless risk,—
But just such inkling, fancy of the fact,
As should suffice to qualify henceforth
The shepherd, when another lamb would stray,
For warning '*Ware the wolf!*' No doubt at all,
Silence is generosity,—keeps wolf
Unhunted by flock's warder! Excellent,
Did—generous to me, mean—just to him!
But, screening the deceiver, lamb were found
Outraging the deceitless! So,—he knows!
And yet, unharmed I breathe—perchance, repent—
Thanks to the mercifully-politic!"

"Ignorance is not innocence but sin—
Witness yourself ignore what after-pangs

Pursue the plague-infected. Merciful
Am I? Perhaps! The more contempt, the less
Hatred; and who so worthy of contempt
As you that rest assured I cooled the spot
I could not cure, by poisoning, forsooth,
Whose hand I pressed there? Understand for once
That, sick, of all the pains corroding me
This burnt the last and nowise least—the need
Of simulating soundness. I resolved—
No matter how the struggle tasked weak flesh—
To hide the truth away as in a grave
From—most of all—my husband: he nor knows
Nor ever shall be made to know your part,
My part, the devil's part,—I trust, God's part
In the foul matter. Saved, I yearn to save
And not destroy: and what destruction like
The abolishing of faith in him, that 's faith
In me as pure and true? Acquaint some child
Who takes yon tree into his confidence,
That, where he sleeps now, was a murder done,
And that the grass which grows so thick, he thinks,
Only to pillow him is product just
Of what lies festering beneath! 'T is God
Must bear such secrets and disclose them. Man?
The miserable thing I have become
By dread acquaintance with my secret—*you*—

That thing had he become by learning *me*—
The miserable, whom his ignorance
Would wrongly call the wicked: ignorance
Being, I hold, sin ever, small or great.
No, he knows nothing!"

"He and I alike
Are bound to you for such discreetness, then.
What if our talk should terminate awhile?
Here is a gentleman to satisfy,
Settle accounts with, pay ten thousand pounds
Before we part—as, by his face, I fear,
Results from your appearance on the scene.
Grant me a minute's parley with my friend
Which scarce admits of a third personage!
The room from which you made your entry first
So opportunely—still untenanted—
What if you please return there? Just a word
To my young friend first—then, a word to you,
And you depart to fan away each fly
From who, grass-pillowed, sleeps so sound at home!"

"So the old truth comes back! A wholesome change,—
At last the altered eye, the rightful tone!
But even to the truth that drops disguise

And stands forth grinning malice which but now
Whined so contritely—I refuse assent
Just as to malice. I, once gone, come back?
No, my lord! I enjoy the privilege
Of being absolutely loosed from you
Too much—the knowledge that your power is null
Which was omnipotence. A word of mouth,
A wink of eye would have detained me once,
Body and soul your slave; and now, thank God,
Your fawningest of prayers, your frightfulest
Of curses—neither would avail to turn
My footstep for a moment!"

"Prayer, then, tries
No such adventure. Let us cast about
For something novel in expedient: take
Command,—what say you? I profess myself
One fertile in resource. Commanding, then,
I bid—not only wait there, but return
Here, where I want you! Disobey and—good!
On your own head the peril!"

"Come!" breaks in
The boy with his good glowing face. "Shut up!
None of this sort of thing while I stand here
—Not to stand that! No bullying, I beg!

I also am to leave you presently
And never more set eyes upon your face—
You won't mind that much; but—I tell you frank—
I do mind having to remember this
For your last word and deed—my friend who were!
Bully a woman you have ruined, eh?
Do you know,—I give credit all at once
To all those stories everybody told
And nobody but I would disbelieve:
They all seem likely now,—nay, certain, sure!
I dare say you did cheat at cards that night
The row was at the Club: '*sauter la coupe*'—
That was your 'cut,' for which your friends 'cut' you
While I, the booby, 'cut'—acquaintanceship
With who so much as laughed when I said '*luck!*'
I dare say you had bets against the horse
They doctored at the Derby; little doubt,
That fellow with the sister found you shirk
His challenge and did kick you like a ball,
Just as the story went about! Enough:
It only serves to show how well advised,
Madam, you were in bidding such a fool
As I, go hang. You see how the mere sight
And sound of you suffice to tumble down
Conviction topsy-turvy: no,—that's false,—
There 's no unknowing what one knows; and yet

Such is my folly that, in gratitude
For . . . well, I 'm stupid; but you seemed to wish
I should know gently what I know, should slip
Softly from old to new, not break my neck
Between beliefs of what you were and are.
Well then, for just the sake of such a wish
To cut no worse a figure than needs must
In even eyes like mine, I 'd sacrifice
Body and soul! But don't think danger—pray!—
Menaces either! He do harm to us?
Let me say 'us' this one time! You 'd allow
I lent perhaps my hand to rid your ear
Of some cur's yelping—hand that 's fortified,
Into the bargain, with a horsewhip? Oh,
One crack and you shall see how curs decamp!
My lord, you know your losses and my gains.
Pay me my money at the proper time!
If cash be not forthcoming,—well, yourself
Have taught me, and tried often, I 'll engage,
The proper course: I post you at the Club,
Pillory the defaulter. Crack, to-day,
Shall, slash, to-morrow, slice through flesh and bone!
There, Madam, you need mind no cur, I think!"

"Ah, what a gain to have an apt no less
Than grateful scholar! Nay, he brings to mind

My knowledge till he puts me to the blush,
So long has it lain rusty! Post my name!
That were indeed a wheal from whipcord! Whew
I wonder now if I could rummage out
—Just to match weapons—some old scorpion-scourge!
Madam, you hear my pupil, may applaud
His triumph o'er the master. I—no more
Bully, since I 'm forbidden : but entreat—
Wait and return—for my sake, no! but just
To save your own defender, should he chance
Get thwacked thro' awkward flourish of his thong.
And what if—since all waiting 's weary work—
I help the time pass 'twixt your exit now
And entry then? for—pastime proper—here 's
The very thing, the Album, verse and prose
To make the laughing minutes launch away!
Each of us must contribute. I 'll begin—
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
I 'm confident I beat the bard,—for why?
My young friend owns me an Iago—him
Confessed, among the other qualities,
A ready rhymer. Oh, he rhymed! Here goes!
—Something to end with '*horsewhip!*' No, that rhyme
Beats me; there 's '*cowslip*,' '*boltsprit*,' nothing else!
So, Tennyson take my benison,—verse for bard,
Prose suits the gambler's book best! Dared and done!'

Wherewith he dips pen, writes a line or two,
Closes and clasps the cover, gives the book,
Bowing the while, to her who hesitates,
Turns half away, turns round again, at last
Takes it as you touch carrion, then retires.
The door shuts fast the couple.

VI.

With a change
Of his whole manner, opens out at once
The Adversary.

"Now, my friend, for you!
You who, protected late, aggressive grown,
Brandish, it seems, a weapon I must 'ware!
Plain speech in me becomes respectable
Henceforth, because courageous; plainly, then—
(Have lash well loose, hold handle tight and light!)
Throughout my life's experience, you indulged
Yourself and friend by passing in review
So courteously but now, I vainly search
To find one record of a specimen
So perfect of the pure and simple fool
As this you furnish me. Ingratitude
I lump with folly,—all 's one lot,—so—fool!
Did I seek you or you seek me? Seek? sneak
For service to, and service you would style—

And did style—godlike, scarce an hour ago!
Fool, there again, yet not precisely there
First-rate in folly: since the hand you kissed
Did pick you from the kennel, did plant firm
Your footstep on the pathway, did persuade
Your awkward shamble to true gait and pace,
Fit for the world you walk in. Once a-strut
On that firm pavement which your cowardice
Was for renouncing as a pitfall, next
Came need to clear your brains of their conceit
They cleverly could distinguish who was who,
Whatever folk might tramp the thoroughfare.
Mèn, now—familiarly you read them off,
Each phyz at first sight! O you had an eye!
Who couched it? made you disappoint each fox
Eager to strip my gosling of his fluff
So golden as he cackled 'Goose trusts lamb?'
'*Ay, but I saved you—wolf defeated fox—*
Wanting to pick your bones myself!' then, wolf
Has got the worst of it with goose for once.
I, penniless, pay you ten thousand pounds
(—No gesture, pray! I pay ere I depart.)
And how you turn advantage to account
Here's the example. Have I proved so wrong
In my peremptory '*debt must be discharged?*'
O you laughed lovelily, were loth to leave

The old friend out at elbows—pooh, a thing
Not to be thought of! I must keep my cash,
And you forget your generosity!
Ha ha, I took your measure when I laughed
My laugh to that! First quarrel—nay, first faint
Pretence at taking umbrage—'*Down with debt,*
Both interest and principal!—The Club,
Exposure and expulsion!—stamp me out!'
That 's the magnanimous magnificent
Renunciation of advantage! Well,
But whence and why did you take umbrage, Sir?
Because your master, having made you know
Somewhat of men, was minded to advance,
Expound you women, still a mystery!
My pupil pottered with a cloud on brow,
A clod in breast: had loved, and vainly loved:
Whence blight and blackness, just for all the world
As Byron used to teach us boys. Thought I—
'*Quick rid him of that rubbish! Clear the cloud,*
And set the heart a-pulsing!'—heart, this time:
'T was nothing but the head I doctored late
For ignorance of Man; now heart 's to dose,
Palsied by over-palpitation due
To Woman-worship—so, to work at once
On first avowal of the patient's ache!
This morning you described your malady,—

How you dared love a piece of virtue—lost
To reason, as the upshot showed: for scorn
Fitly repaid your stupid arrogance;
And, parting, you went two ways, she resumed
Her path—perfection, while forlorn you paced
The world that 's made for beasts like you and me.
My remedy was—tell the fool the truth!
Your paragon of purity had plumped
Into these arms at their first outspread—'*fallen*
My victim,' she prefers to turn the phrase—
And, in exchange for that frank confidence,
Asked for my whole life present and to come—
Marriage: a thing uncovenanted for,
Never so much as put in question. Life—
Implied by marriage—throw that trifle in
And round the bargain off, no otherwise
Than if, when we played cards, because you won
My money you should also want my head!
That, I demurred to: we but played '*for love*'—
She won my love; had she proposed for stakes
'*Marriage*,'—why, that 's for whist, a wiser game.
Whereat she raved at me, as losers will,
And went her way. So far the story 's known,
The remedy 's applied, no farther: which
Here 's the sick man's first *honorarium* for—
Posting his medicine-monger at the Club!

That being, Sir, the whole you mean my fee—
In gratitude for such munificence
I 'm bound in common honesty to spare
No droplet of the draught: so,—pinch your nose,
Pull no wry faces!—drain it to the dregs!
I say '*She went off*'—'*went off*,' you subjoin,
'*Since not to wedded bliss, as I supposed,*
Sure to some convent: solitude and peace
Help her to hide the shame from mortal view,
With prayer and fasting.' No, my sapient Sir!
Far wiselier, straightway she betook herself
To a prize-portent from the donkey-show
Of leathern long-ears that compete for palm
In clerical absurdity: since he,
Good ass, nor practises the shaving-trick,
The candle-crotchet, nonsense which repays
When you 've young ladies congregant,—but schools
The poor,—toils, moils and grinds the mill nor means
To stop and munch one thistle in this life
Till next life smother him with roses: just
The parson for her purpose! Him she stroked
Over the muzzle; into mouth with bit,
And on to back with saddle,—there he stood,
The serviceable beast who heard, believed
And meekly bowed him to the burden,—borne
Off in a canter to seclusion—ay,

The lady 's lost ! But had a friend of mine
—While friend he was—imparted his sad case
To sympathizing counsellor, full soon
One cloud at least had vanished from his brow.
'*Don't fear!*' had followed reassuringly—
'*The lost will in due time turn up again,*
Probably just when, weary of the world,
You think of nothing less than settling-down
To country life and golden days, beside
A dearest best and brightest virtuousest
Wife: who needs no more hope to hold her own
Against the naughty-and-repentant—no,
Than water-gruel against Roman punch!'
And as I prophesied, it proves ! My youth,—
Just at the happy moment when, subdued
To spooniness, he finds that youth fleets fast,
That town-life tires, that men should drop boys'-play
That property, position have, no doubt,
Their exigency with their privilege,
And if the wealthy wed with wealth, how dire
The double duty !—in, behold, there beams
Our long-lost lady, form and face complete !
And where 's my moralizing pupil now,
Had not his master missed a train by chance ?
But, by your side instead of whirled away,
How have I spoiled scene, stopped catastrophe,

Struck flat the stage-effect I know by heart!
Sudden and strange the meeting—improvised?
Bless you, the last event she hoped or dreamed!
But rude sharp stroke will crush out fire from flint—
Assuredly from flesh. *'T is you?' 'Myself.'*
'Changed?' 'Changeless.' 'Then, what's earth to me?' 'To me
What's heaven?' 'So,—thine!' 'And thine!' 'And likewise mine!'
Had laughed '*Amen*' the devil, but for me
Whose intermeddling hinders this hot haste,
And bids you, ere concluding contract, pause—
Ponder one lesson more, then sign and seal
At leisure and at pleasure,—lesson's price
Being, if you have skill to estimate,
—How say you?—I 'm discharged my debt in full!
Since paid you stand, to farthing uttermost,
Unless I fare like that black majesty
A friend of mine had visit from last Spring.
Coasting along the Cape-side, he 's becalmed
Off an uncharted bay, a novel town
Untouched at by the trader: here 's a chance!
Out paddles straight the king in his canoe,
Comes over bulwark, says he means to buy
Ship's cargo—being rich and having brought
A treasure ample for the purpose. See!

Four dragons, stalwart blackies, guard the same
Wrapped round and round: its hulls, a multitude,—
Palm-leaf and cocoa-mat and goat's-hair cloth
All duly braced about with bark and board,—
Suggest how brave, 'neath coat, must kernel be!
At length the peeling is accomplished, plain
The casket opens out its core, and lo
—A brand-new British silver sixpence—bid
That 's ample for the Bank,—thinks majesty!
You are the Captain; call my sixpence cracked
Or copper; *'what I 've said is calumny;*
The lady 's spotless!' Then, I 'll prove my words,
Or make you prove them true as truth—yourself,
Here, on the instant! I 'll not mince my speech,
Things at this issue. When she enters, then,
Make love to her! No talk of marriage now—
The point-blank bare proposal! Pick no phrase—
Prevent all misconception! Soon you 'll see
How different the tactics when she deals
With an instructed man, no longer boy
Who blushes like a booby. Woman's wit!
Man, since you have instruction, blush no more!
Such your five minutes' profit by my pains,
'T is simply now—demand and be possessed!
Which means—you may possess—may strip the tree
Of fruit desirable to make one wise.

More I nor wish nor want: your act 's your act,
My teaching is but—there 's the fruit to pluck
Or let alone at pleasure. Next advance
In knowledge were beyond you! Don't expect
I bid a novice—pluck, suck, send sky-high
Such fruit, once taught that neither crab nor sloe
Falls readier prey to who but robs a hedge,
Than this gold apple to my Hercules.
Were you no novice but proficient—then,
Then, truly, I might prompt you—Touch and taste,
Try flavour and be tired as soon as I!
Toss on the prize to greedy mouths agape,
Betake yours, sobered as the satiate grow,
To wise man's solid meal of house and land,
Consols and cousin! but my boy, my boy,
Such lore 's above you!

Here 's the lady back!
So, Madam, you have conned the Album-page
And come to thank its last contributor?
How kind and condescending! I retire
A moment, lest I spoil the interview,
And mar my own endeavour to make friends—
You with him, him with you, and both with me!
If I succeed—permit me to inquire
Five minutes hence! Friends bid good-bye, you know."
And out he goes.

VII.

She, face, form, bearing, one
Superb composure—

"He has told you all?
Yes, he has told you all, your silence says—
What gives him, as he thinks the mastery
Over my body and my soul!—has told
That instance, even, of their servitude
He now exacts of me? A silent blush!
That 's well, though better would white ignorance
Beseem your brow, undesecrate before—
Ay, when I left you! I too learn at last
—Hideously learned as I seemed so late—
What sin may swell to. Yes,—I needed learn
That, when my prophet's rod became the snake
I fled from, it would, one day, swallow up
—Incorporate whatever serpentine
Falsehood and treason and unmanliness
Beslime earth's pavement: such the power of Hell,

And so beginning, ends no otherwise
The Adversary! I was ignorant,
Blameworthy—if you will; but blame I take
Nowise upon me as I ask myself
— *You*—how can you, whose soul I seemed to read
The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep
Even with him for consort? I revolve
Much memory, pry into the looks and words
Of that day's walk beneath the College wall,
And nowhere can distinguish, in what gleams
Only pure marble through my dusky past,
A dubious cranny where such poison-seed
Might harbour, nourish what should yield to-day
This dread ingredient for the cup I drink,
Do not I recognize and honour truth
In seeming?—take your truth and for return,
Give you my truth, a no less precious gift?
You loved me: I believed you. I replied
—How could I other? '*I was not my own*,'
—No longer had the eyes to see, the ears
To hear, the mind to judge, since heart and soul
Now were another's. My own right in me,
For well or ill, consigned away—my face
Fronted the honest path, deflection whence
Had shamed me in the furtive backward look
At the late bargain—fit such chapman's phrase!—

As though—less hasty and more provident—
Waiting had brought advantage. Not for me
The chapman's chance! Yet while thus much was true,
I spared you—as I knew you then—one more
Concluding word which, truth no less, seemed best
Buried away for ever. Take it now
Its power to pain is past! Four years—that day—
Those limes that make the College avenue!
I would that—friend and foe—by miracle,
I had, that moment, seen into the heart
Of either, as I now am taught to see!
I do believe I should have straight assumed
My proper function, and sustained a soul,
Nor aimed at being just sustained myself
By some man's soul—the weaker woman's-want!
So had I missed the momentary thrill
Of finding me in presence of a god,
But gained the god's own feeling when he gives
Such thrill to what turns life from death before.
'*Gods many and Lords many*,' says the Book:
You would have yielded up your soul to me
—Not to the false god who has burned its clay
In his own image. I had shed my love
Like Spring dew on the clod all flowery thence,
Not sent up a wild vapour to the sun

That drinks and then disperses. Both of us
Blameworthy,—I first meet my punishment—
And not so hard to bear. I breathe again!
Forth from those arms' enwinding leprosy
At last I struggle—uncontaminate:
Why must I leave *you* pressing to the breast
That 's all one plague-spot? Did you love me once?
Then take love's last and best return! I think,
Womanliness means only motherhood;
All love begins and ends there,—roams enough,
But, having run the circle, rests at home.
Why is your expiation yet to make?
Pull shame with your own hands from your own head
Now,—never wait the slow envelopment
Submitted to by unelastic age!
One fierce throe frees the sapling: flake on flake
Lull till they leave the oak snow-stupefied.
Your heart retains its vital warmth—or why
That blushing reassurance? Blush, young blood!
Break from beneath this icy premature
Captivity of wickedness—I warn
Back, in God's name! No fresh encroachment here!
This May breaks all to bud—no Winter now!
Friend, we are both forgiven! Sin no more!
I am past sin now, so shall you become!
Meanwhile I testify that, lying once,

My foe lied ever, most lied last of all.
He, waking, whispered to your sense asleep
The wicked counsel,—and assent might seem;
But, roused, your healthy indignation breaks
The idle dream-pact. You would die—not dare
Confirm your dream-resolve,—nay, find the word
That fits the deed to bear the light of day!
Say I have justly judged you! then farewell
To blushing—nay, it ends in smiles, not tears!
Why tears now? I have justly judged, thank God!"

He does blush boy-like, but the man speaks out,
—Makes the due effort to surmount himself.

"I don't know what he wrote—how should I? Nor
How he could read my purpose which, it seems,
He chose to somehow write—mistakenly
Or else for mischief's sake. I scarce believe
My purpose put before you fair and plain
Would need annoy so much; but there 's my luck—
From first to last I blunder. Still, one more
Turn at the target, try to speak my thought!
Since he could guess my purpose, won't you read
Right what he set down wrong? He said—let 's think!
Ay, so!—he did begin by telling heaps
Of tales about you. Now, you see—suppose

Anyone told me—my own mother died
Before I knew her—told me—to his cost!—
Such tales about my own dead mother: why,
You would not wonder surely if I knew,
By nothing but my own heart's help, he lied,
Would you? No reason 's wanted in the case.
So with you! In they burnt on me, his tales,
Much as when madhouse-inmates crowd around,
Make captive any visitor and scream
All sorts of stories of their keeper—he 's
Both dwarf and giant, vulture, wolf, dog, cat,
Serpent and scorpion, yet man all the same;
Sane people soon see through the gibberish!
I just made out, you somehow lived somewhere
A life of shame—I can't distinguish more—
Married or single—how, don't matter much:
Shame which himself had caused—that point was clear,
That fact confessed—that thing to hold and keep.
Oh, and he added some absurdity
—That you were here to make me—ha, ha, ha!—
Still love you, still of mind to die for you,
Ha, ha—as if that needed mighty pains!
Now, foolish as . . . but never mind myself
—What I am, what I am not, in the eye
Of the world, is what I never cared for much.
Fool then or no fool, not one single word

In the whole string of lies did I believe,
But this—this only—if I choke, who cares?—
I believe somehow in your purity
Perfect as ever! Else what use is God?
He is God, and work miracles He can!
Then, what shall I do? Quite as clear, my course!
They 've got a thing they call their Labyrinth
I' the garden yonder: and my cousin played
A pretty trick once, led and lost me deep
Inside the briery maze of hedge round hedge;
And there might I be staying now, stock-still,
But that I laughing bade eyes follow nose
And so straight pushed my path through let and stop
And soon was out in the open, face all scratched,
But well behind my back the prison-bars
In sorry plight enough, I promise you!
So here: I won my way to truth through lies—
Said, as I saw light,—if her shame be shame
I 'll rescue and redeem her,—shame 's no shame?
Then, I 'll avenge, protect—redeem myself
The stupidest of sinners! Here I stand!
Dear,—let me once dare call you so,—you said
Thus ought you to have done, four years ago,
Such things and such! Ay, dear, and what ought I?
You were revealed to me: where 's gratitude,
Where 's memory even, where the gain of you

Discernible in my low after-life
Of fancied consolation? why, no horse
Once fed on corn, will, missing corn, go munch
Mere thistles like a donkey! I missed you,
And in your place found—him, made him my love,
Ay, did I,—by this token, that he taught
So much beast-nature that I meant . . . God knows
Whether I bow me to the dust enough! . . .
To marry—yes, my cousin here! I hope
That was a master-stroke! Take heart of hers,
And give her hand of mine with no more heart
Than now you see upon this brow I strike!
What atom of a heart do I retain
Not all yours? Dear, you know it! Easily
May she accord me pardon when I place
My brow beneath her foot, if foot so deign,
Since uttermost indignity is spared—
Mere marriage and no love! And all this time
Not one word to the purpose! Are you free?
Only wait! only let me serve—deserve
Where you appoint and how you see the good!
I have the will—perhaps the power—at least
Means that have power against the world. For time—
Take my whole life for your experiment!
If you are bound—in marriage, say—why, still,
Still, sure, there 's something for a friend to do,

Outside? A mere well-wisher, understand!
I 'll sit, my life long, at your gate, you know,
Swing it wide open to let you and him
Pass freely,—and you need not look, much less
Fling me a '*Thank you—are you there, old friend?*'
Don't say that even: I should drop like shot!
So I feel now at least: some day, who knows?
After no end of weeks and months and years
You might smile '*I believe you did your best!*'
And that shall make my heart leap—leap such leap
As lands the feet in Heaven to wait you there!
Ah, there 's just one thing more! How pale you look!
Why? Are you angry? If there 's, after all,
Worst come to worst—if still there somehow be
The shame—I said was no shame,—none, I swear!—
In that case, if my hand and what it holds,—
My name,—might be your safeguard now—at once—
Why, here 's the hand—you have the heart! Of course—
No cheat, no binding you, because I 'm bound,
To let me off probation by one day,
Week, month, year, lifetime! Prove as you propose!
Here 's the hand with the name to take or leave!
That 's all—and no great piece of news, I hope!"

"Give me the hand, then!" she cries hastily.
"Quick, now! I hear his footstep!"

Hand in hand
The couple face him as he enters, stops
Short, stands surprised a moment, laughs away
Surprise, resumes the much-experienced man.

"So, you accept him?"

"Till us death do part!"

"No longer? Come, that 's right and rational!
I fancied there was power in common sense,
But did not know it worked thus promptly. Well—
At last each understands the other, then?
Each drops disguise, then? So, at supper-time
These masquerading people doff their gear,
Grand Turk his pompous turban, Quakeress
Her stiff-starched bib and tucker,—make-believe
That only bothers when, ball-business done,
Nature demands champagne and *mayonnaise.*
Just so has each of us sage three abjured
His and her moral pet particular
Pretension to superiority,
And, cheek by jowl, we henceforth munch and joke!
Go, happy pair, paternally dismissed
To live and die together—for a month,
Discretion can award no more! Depart

From whatsoe'er the calm sweet solitude
Selected—Paris not improbably—
At month's end, when the honeycomb 's left wax,
—You, daughter, with a pocketful of gold
Enough to find your village boys and girls
In duffel cloaks and hobnailed shoes from May
To—what 's the phrase ?—Christmas-come-never-mas !
You, son and heir of mine, shall re-appear
Ere Spring-time, that 's the ring-time, lose one leaf,
And—not without regretful smack of lip
The while you wipe it free of honey-smear—
Marry the cousin, play the magistrate,
Stand for the county, prove perfection's pink—
Master of hounds, gay-coated dine—nor die
Sooner than needs of gout, obesity,
And sons at Christ Church ! As for me,—ah me,
I abdicate—retire on my success,
Four years well occupied in teaching youth
—My son and daughter the exemplary !
Time for me to retire now, having placed
Proud on their pedestal the pair : in turn,
Let them do homage to their master ! You,—
Well, your flushed cheek and flashing eye proclaim
Sufficiently your gratitude : you paid
The *honorarium*, the ten thousand pounds
To purpose, did you not ? I told you so !

And you, but, bless me, why so pale -so faint
At influx of good fortune? Certainly,
No matter how or why or whose the fault,
I save your life—save it, nor less nor more!
You blindly were resolved to welcome death
In that black boor-and-bumpkin-haunted hole
Of his, the prig with all the preachments! *You*
Installed as nurse and matron to the crones
And wenches, while there lay a world outside
Like Paris (which again I recommend)
In company and guidance of—first, this,
Then—all in good time—some new friend as fit—
What if I were to say, some fresh myself,
As I once figured? Each dog has his day,
And mine 's at sunset: what should old dog do
But eye young litters' frisky puppyhood?
Oh I shall watch this beauty and this youth
Frisk it in brilliance! But don't fear! Discreet,
I shall pretend to no more recognize
My quondam pupils than the doctor nods
When certain old acquaintances may cross
His path in Park, or sit down prim beside
His plate at dinner-table: tip nor wink
Scares patients he has put, for reason good,
Under restriction,—maybe, talked sometimes
Of douche or horsewhip to,—for why? because

The gentleman would crazily declare
His best friend was—Iago! Ay, and worse—
The lady, all at once grown lunatic,
In suicidal monomania vowed,
To save her soul, she needs must starve herself!
They 're cured now, both, and I tell nobody.
Why don't you speak? Nay, speechless, each of you
Can spare,—without unclasping plighted troth,—
At least one hand to shake! Left-hands will do—
Yours first, my daughter! Ah, it guards—it gripes
The precious Album fast—and prudently!
As well obliterate the record there
On page the last: allow me tear the leaf!
Pray, now! And afterward, to make amends,
What if all three of us contribute each
A line to that prelusive fragment,—help
The embarrassed bard who broke out to break down
Dumbfoundered at such unforeseen success?
'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot*'
You begin—*place aux dames!* I 'll prompt you then!
'*Here do I take the good the gods allot!*'
Next you, Sir! What, still sulky? Sing, O Muse!
'*Here does my lord in full discharge his shot!*'
Now for the crowning flourish! mine shall be . . ."

"Nothing to match your first effusion, mar

What was, is, shall remain your masterpiece!
Authorship has the alteration-itch!
No, I protest against erasure. Read,
My friend!" (she gasps out). "Read and quickly read
'*Before us death do part*,' what made you mine
And made me yours—the marriage-licence here!
Decide if he is like to mend the same!"

And so the lady, white to ghastliness,
Manages somehow to display the page
With left-hand only, while the right retains
The other hand, the young man's,—dreaming-drunk
He, with this drench of stupefying stuff,
Eyes wide, mouth open,—half the idiot's stare
And half the prophet's insight,—holding tight,
All the same, by his one fact in the world—
The lady's right-hand: he but seems to read—
Does not, for certain; yet, how understand
Unless he reads?

So, understand he does,
For certain. Slowly, word by word, *she* reads
Aloud that licence—or that warrant, say.

"'*One against two—and two that urge their odds*
To uttermost—I needs must try resource!

Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn
Body and soul: you spurned and safely spurned
So you had spared me the superfluous taunt
"Prostration means no power to stand erect,
Stand, trampling on who trampled—prostrate now!'"
So, with my other fool-foe: I was fain
Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,
And him the infection gains, he too must needs
Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so!
Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence.
He loves you; he demands your love: both know
What love means in my language. Love him then!
Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt:
Therefore, deliver me from him, thereby
Likewise delivering from me yourself!
For, hesitate—much more, refuse consent—
I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat
Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase!
Consent—you stop my mouth, the only way.'

"I did well, trusting instinct: knew your hand
Had never joined with his in fellowship
Over this pact of infamy. You known—
As he was known through every nerve of me.
Therefore I '*stopped his mouth the only way*'
But *my* way! none was left for you, my friend—

The loyal—near, the loved one! No—no—no!
Threaten? Chastise? The coward would but quail.
Conquer who can, the cunning of the snake!
Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head,
And still you leave vibration of the tongue.
His malice had redoubled—not on me
Who, myself, choose my own refining fire—
But on poor unsuspicious innocence;
And,—victim,—to turn executioner
Also—that feat effected, forky tongue
Had done indeed its office! Once snake's '*mouth*'
Thus '*open*'—how could mortal '*stop it*'?"

"So!"

A tiger-flash—yell, spring, and scream: halloo!
Death 's out and on him, has and holds him—ugh!
But *ne trucidet coram populo*
Juvenis senem! Right the Horatian rule!

There, see how soon a quiet comes to pass!

VIII.

The youth is somehow by the lady's side.
His right-hand grasps her right-hand once again.
Both gaze on the dead body. Hers the word.

"And that was good but useless. Had I lived
The danger was to dread: but, dying now—
Himself would hardly become talkative,
Since talk no more means torture. Fools—what fools
These wicked men are! Had I borne four years,
Four years of weeks and months and days and nights,
Inured me to the consciousness of life
Coiled round by his life, with the tongue to ply,—
But that I bore about me, for prompt use
At urgent need, the thing that '*stops the mouth*'
And stays the venom? Since such need was now
Or never,—how should use not follow need?
Bear witness for me, I withdraw from life
By virtue of the licence—warrant, say,
That blackens yet this Album—white again,
Thanks still to my one friend who tears the page!

Now, let me write the line of supplement,
As counselled by my foe there: '*each a line!*'"

And she does falteringly write to end.

"*I die now through the villain who lies dead,*
Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,
So, my defender slew him. God protect
The right! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now.
Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent
In blessing my defender from my soul!"

And so ends the Inn Album.

As she dies,
Begins outside a voice that sounds like song,
And is indeed half song though meant for speech
Muttered in time to motion—stir of heart
That unsubduably must bubble forth
To match the fawn-step as it mounts the stair.

"All 's ended and all 's over! Verdict found
'*Not guilty*'—prisoner forthwith set free,
Mid cheers the Court pretends to disregard!
Now Portia, now for Daniel, late severe,
At last appeased, benignant! '*This young man*—

Hem—has the young man's foibles but no fault.
He's virgin soil—a friend must cultivate.
I think no plant called 'love' grows wild—a friend
May introduce, and name the bloom, the fruit!'
Here somebody dares wave a handkerchief—
She 'll want to hide her face with presently!
Good-bye then! '*Cigno fedel, cigno fedel,*
Addio!' Now, was ever such mistake—
Ever such foolish ugly omen? Pshaw!
Wagner, beside! '*Amo te solo, te*
Solo amai!' That 's worth fifty such!
But, mum, the grave face at the opened door!"

And so the good gay girl, with eyes and cheeks
Diamond and damask,—cheeks so white erewhile
Because of a vague fancy, idle fear
Chased on reflection!—pausing, taps discreet;
And then, to give herself a countenance,
Before she comes upon the pair inside,
Loud—the oft-quoted, long-laughed-over line—
"'*Hail, calm acclivity, salubrious spot!*'
Open the door!"

No: let the curtain fall!

END OF THE TWELFTH VOLUME.

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